



## **School Curriculum in the News: Black Lives Matter and the Continuing Struggle for Culturally Responsive Education**

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**Abstract:** This project examines similarities and differences in the ways that major U.S. newspapers (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, etc.) and the more focused ethnic and minority press (e.g., *The Baltimore Afro-American*, *The Milwaukee Courier*, etc.) characterize educator's efforts to adopt more culturally responsive educational practices and curriculum. The analysis utilized two distinct full-text ProQuest news databases, *U.S. Major Dailies* and *Ethnic News Watch*, and Boolean search logic to identify a corpus of 72 relevant articles. Within these articles, a process of close reading and coding identified three major frames that cut across articles drawn from both databases: *Challenging the Dominant Narrative*; *Activism and Engaged Citizenship*; and *Defending American Heritage and Patriotism*. Differences in the use of these frames across the two datasets are discussed. These frames are interpreted in light of conflicting views on the nature of the American dream.

**Keywords:** *Curriculum, Culturally Responsive Education, Media Framing, Black Lives Matter*

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### **Introduction**

The killing of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who knelt on Floyd's neck, making it impossible for him to breathe, catalyzed protests across the United States against racism and police violence. These protests were part of the larger Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which began in 2012 following the killing of Trayvon Martin. The size, intensity, and duration of the protests held during the summer of 2020 demonstrated the strength of the movement and the depth of concern over continued police violence. These protests raised White awareness of racial inequality in the United States and reinforced efforts to hold police and other public institutions—including public schools—accountable.

Although the BLM movement has been at the forefront of Black activism over the past decade, its emergence as a force for social justice is rooted in a long history of Black social and political thought. According to Lebron (2017), the ongoing struggle for equal rights is rooted in the efforts of earlier activists such as Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglas, James Baldwin, and others who clearly articulated the injustice experienced by Black Americans. Concerning the issue of police violence, BLM is also connected to the Black Power movement of the 1960s, which brought attention to police brutality and the unequal treatment of Blacks in the prison system. In addition, the Black Power movement also focused on community organizing and education by developing “liberation schools” that sought to address the failure of public schools to provide Black youth with a deeper understanding of their history. According to Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest (2009), these schools also sought to help Black students gain the skills and knowledge they would need to challenge racism and social inequality.

Taking up this legacy, school-focused organizations associated with the BLM movement, such as the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) and Black Lives Matter at School (BLMS), have sought to raise awareness of educational inequality and disrupt what education scholars refer to as the “school to prison pipeline.” According to Watson, Hagopian, and Au (2018), this pipeline “starts with a curriculum that conceals the struggles and contributions of Black people and other people of color. It is a curriculum that fails to respect young Black people as intellectuals and ignores their culture, communities, and concerns” (p. 9). When public schools fail to teach about Black history and Black contributions, “Black people are themselves denied” (Watson et al., 2018, p.10).

Key to understanding the perpetuation of systemic racism is the public-school curriculum. This curriculum, particularly in the areas of social studies, has generally excluded Black history while simultaneously including “inaccurate, silenced, stereotypical characterizations” of Black Americans (Brown et al., 2013, p 30). According to Brown, Heilig, and Brown (2013), public schooling has failed to “address issues of Whiteness and racism” (p. 34) that are deeply embedded in U.S. social institutions. While pressure to change the curriculum to address these concerns has been ongoing since the 1920s (DuBois, 1935, 2009; Locke, 1925, 1986; Woodson, 1933), the issue has gained new momentum as calls for racial justice have gained support among the American public (Kendi, 2020). For example, BLMS believes that there is “new urgency and radical possibilities for advancing abolitionist practice and uprooting institutional racism” (*Black Lives Matter At School*, n.d., para. 3). Movement leaders have worked to organize educators from around the United States to teach about “structural racism, intersectional Black identities, Black history, and anti-racist movements” (*Black Lives Matter At School*, n.d., para.3). Beyond addressing problems with the curriculum, the organization’s goals extend to issues such as discipline and policing in schools (Watson et al., 2018). Along with the efforts of groups like Black Lives Matter in School, journalistic projects such as the 1619 Project have also sought to provide teachers and schools with new perspectives, curricula, and insights about the way history shapes the present.

Opposing these efforts are conservative politicians, including President Trump (2020a), who derided these types of curricular reforms as “left-wing indoctrination” (para. 10). In his public remarks on Constitution Day in 2020, President Trump claimed that the American people should “clear away the twisted web of lies in our schools and classrooms” (para. 2), which “make students ashamed of their own history” (para. 10). President Trump also claimed that Critical Race Theory was being forced into public schools, teaching students that “America is a wicked and racist nation” (Trump, 2020a, para. 14). Rather than work to help students

understand the cause and consequences of structural racism, the president supported the development of a “pro-American curriculum” that “celebrates the *truth* [emphasis added] about our nation’s great history” (para. 23).

Given these differences in perspective and the fact that the BLM movement gained greater exposure in the mainstream media during the summer of 2020, the purpose of this project is to examine similarities and differences in the ways that major U.S. newspapers (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, etc.) and the more focused ethnic and minority press (e.g., *The Baltimore Afro-American*, *The Milwaukee Courier*, etc.) characterize the efforts to adopt more culturally responsive educational practices and curriculum. In a democracy, the media plays an essential role in informing the public about important issues and also provides political actors with a platform for sharing their ideologies, interests, and preferred policies with the public. However, journalists, editors, and news organizations do more than simply transmit information; they also highlight certain aspects of stories while overlooking others. This process, known as *framing*, influences the goals and initiatives that are viewed as legitimate by the public. Individuals, interest groups, networks, and other political actors, sometimes referred to as *frame sponsors*, often have a strong interest in shaping both the framing of the news and the public policy outcomes associated with their interests.

In the sections that follow, I examine the ways in which the news depicts the efforts of those encouraging schools to adopt more culturally relevant forms of education. Before describing this work, however, I consider the political context within which efforts to reshape the school curriculum exist and review the role of media in shaping public discourse. I then describe the methodology that I used to both select and analyze a corpus of news articles for study. Through this analysis, I was able to identify three dominant news frames that I describe as “challenging the dominant narrative,” “activism and engagement,” and “defending American heritage and patriotism.” In addition, I examine differences in new framing based on whether the news source is national in scope or more focused on an ethnic audience. I conclude the article by interpreting these frames in light of conflicting views on the nature of the American dream.

### **Context of the Study**

The inspiration for this study is the *1619 Project* which provides a recent example of the role race plays in debates over school curriculum (understood broadly to include both content and educational practices). This collection of essays, published in the *New York Times* in 2019 to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first enslaved Africans arriving in Virginia — reevaluates the centrality of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans to the growth and development of the United States. According to Nikole Hannah-Jones, who was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for her writing as lead author of the project, “This essay was about democracy and the unparalleled role that Black Americans have played almost always without getting credit and actually creating the democracy that we have and making those glorious words of the declaration actually true for all Americans” (Shapiro, A., 2020, para. 7). Hoping to use the essays in the collection to improve the teaching of U.S. history, the Pulitzer Center, a non-profit organization supporting public interest journalism (and independent of the Pulitzer Prize organization), invested in the development of a free downloadable curriculum that “asks students to examine the history and legacy of slavery in the United States, as well as our national memory” (Will, 2019, para. 1). The curriculum provides teachers with source material, lessons, and activities appropriate for all grade levels and also identifies how the lessons could be used to address Common Core Standards.

Conservative think tanks, including the Heritage Foundation, quickly began to critique the curriculum. Mike Gonzales, a Heritage Center Senior Fellow, claimed that,

The [Pulitzer Center] curriculum provides reading material, activities, videos, graphic organizers, etc., that will indoctrinate young minds on how America and its capitalist system are racist to the core. Its goal: destroy our present institutions, economic system and ways of thinking, and replace them. (Gonzalez, 2020, para. 5)

In September 2020, President Trump called for the U.S. Department of Education to investigate whether California schools were using the *1619 Project* as part of the public-school curriculum. He said that he intended to “defund” schools found to be using the curriculum (CNN, 2020). To further support “pro-American” education, President Trump also established the 1776 Commission in November of 2020. The goal of the commission was to “improve understanding of the history and the principles of the founding of the United States among our Nation’s rising generations” (Trump, 2020b, para. 1). The president also ordered “Federal agencies to prioritize patriotic education in the delivery of Federal resources” (Trump, 2020b, para. 5).

Such efforts to make the school curriculum explicitly “pro-American” and “patriotic” illustrate the challenges faced by those attempting to broaden the curriculum and embrace culturally relevant forms of pedagogy. They also demonstrate the importance of the school curriculum as a means to advance or hinder the adoption of particular values and ideologies. Individuals and groups seeking to change the school curriculum understand that the things students learn at school will influence the decisions they make regarding political, economic, and moral issues later in life (Spring, 2005). Because the stakes are high, struggles over the content of school curricula are commonplace, and there are many impediments that have limited the adoption of culturally relevant curricula and educational practices.<sup>1</sup> The following subsections review some of these impediments while also highlighting the efforts of groups such as BLM and M4BL to make meaningful change.

### **Impediments to Curricular Reform**

The current political context described above is rooted in a history of omission and evasion with respect to the inclusion of culturally relevant curriculum. Following the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board* in 1954 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1968, there was significant pressure on schools to address obvious omissions and inaccuracies in the school curriculum related to issues of race. According to Gay (1983), Black students and other students of color began to work together during this period, forming a broad-based movement in support of multicultural education and ethnic studies.

The number of multicultural education programs grew as educators sought to respond to the demands of historically oppressed groups for greater representation in the curriculum. However, Gorski (1999) notes that most of this growth “focused on slight changes or additions to traditional curriculum” (para. 5). The problem with this additive approach, he explains, is that it serves to further define traditional curricular topics as “the curricular ‘norm’ and curriculum that deals with issues of race and ethnicity as the marginalized ‘other’” (para. 7). Smith (2017) explains that this is just one of several reasons why more robust efforts to teach and discuss race have remained on the margin of mainstream curricula. Other reasons include, but are not limited

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<sup>1</sup> Ladson-Billings (1995) defines cultural relevant curriculum and pedagogy as resting on three criteria: (1) the development of academic skills; (2) the utilization of student culture to support learning; and (3) the development of “broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique cultural norms, values mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 162).

to, disagreement about the goals of multicultural education, fears that education about race will be divisive, and the influence of standards and testing on what is taught.

As the conflict over the *1619 Project Curriculum* demonstrates, the possibility that the public-school curriculum might begin to teach students about the role of slavery and segregation as causes of social inequality makes some political and educational leaders uncomfortable. Such leaders believe that openly focusing on controversial topics will lead to division and conflict (Kandrovy, 2005) and might potentially disrupt the status quo. This is a long-standing perspective. According to Blum (1997), “Antiracist education can seem to pit groups against each other, and encourage anger in victimized groups and resentment among White students (e.g. ‘I didn’t have anything to do with slavery or segregation; don’t blame me!’)” (p. 23). Such concerns, Blum (1997) argued, are often exaggerated and are much less of a threat to the development of a unified society than existing inequality marked by

the creation of an internationally-oriented class of wealthy Americans with little loyalty to their nation, the flight of capital and jobs overseas, the enclaving of wealthy, and overwhelmingly White, people in self-enclosed communities (often with their own security systems), the decreasing lack of public contact between people of different classes. (p. 23)

In other words, learning about inequality in school through reading and discussion is likely less divisive than the lived experience of inequality.

Nonetheless, opponents of multicultural education and ethnic studies still fear that curricular inclusion will not only foment division but also provide an unfair advantage to historically disadvantaged groups. Such fears are certainly behind recent efforts to limit students’ ability to learn about racial inequality and America’s history of racial oppression. According to Schwartz (2021), writing in *Education Week*, “Since January 2021, 41 states have introduced bills or taken other steps that would restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism, according to an *Education Week* analysis. Fifteen states have imposed these bans and restrictions either through legislation or other avenues” (para. 4). While not explicitly part of the K-12 public school curriculum, Critical Race Theory (CRT), which focuses on the systemic nature of racism in American society, has “been warped from its original meaning” and “used by opponents of diversity training as a catch-all to refer to anything that makes race or gender salient in conversations about power and oppression” (Schwartz, 2021, para. 10). This kind of widespread denial about the role race plays in social inequality helps to illustrate the immense challenge facing those interested in the adoption of more culturally relevant curricula.

### **Enter Black Lives Matter**

Public education’s continued failure to adequately address issues of race and injustice has led groups like M4BL and BLMS to agitate for more culturally responsive forms of education (CRE). According to Johnston, Montalbano, and Kirkland (2017), CRE is aimed at creating “more inclusively-minded and more asset-focused instruction of diverse student populations” (p.19). Citing Gay (2010), the authors argue that this type of education treats students’ backgrounds as assets and seeks to make education “comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory” (Gay in Johnston et al., 2017, p. 20).

To address educational inequalities, Watson, Hagopian, and Au (2018) explain that educators in Seattle began working together in 2016 to support Black students and began to teach more explicitly about Black history and the ongoing struggle against racism. This movement has

since grown into a national coalition of educators known as “Black Lives Matter at School,” which organizes a yearly “week of action” in February and advocates for the following changes in public schools:

1. End “zero tolerance” discipline, and implement restorative justice
2. Hire more Black teachers
3. Mandate Black history and ethnic studies in K-12 curriculum
4. Fund counselors, not cops (Black Lives Matter at Schools, n.d.)

These demands are consistent with the goals of CRE and seek to reform educational practices that have disadvantaged Black students and other students of color for decades. The BLMS agenda is similar, though it focuses more explicitly on “zero tolerance” disciplinary practices that have been shown to harm Black students. By naming specific educational practices and goals, this agenda is an effort to change the educational environment in ways that are attuned to both historical and current forms of oppression that are embedded in schools.

Having considered some of the barriers that limit the adoption of more culturally responsive forms of education alongside efforts by some groups to overcome these hurdles, I now turn to the role of the media in shaping the way the public understands and responds to these issues. As mentioned earlier, the media’s framing of issues matters because it influences the public’s understanding of which goals and perspectives are legitimate or proscribed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Studying the way that the media frames efforts to address issues such as the push for CRE is necessary because this framing has the potential to influence the way individuals think about the content of the school curriculum and the overall purpose of public education.

Rather than simply transmitting information, journalists, editors, and news organizations highlight certain aspects of stories while omitting others. This process, known as “framing,” provides the public with a particular interpretation of issues and events (Nisbet, 2009, p. 15). According to Nisbet (2009), framing is an unavoidable byproduct of journalists’ efforts to pare down information and highlight what they consider to be important. In this sense, journalists play a mediating role as they receive, interpret, and transmit information to the public (D’Angelo & Kuypers, 2009).

These efforts, suggest D’Angelo & Kuypers (2009), are influenced by the ways that “politicians, issue advocates, and stakeholders... communicate their preferred meaning of events and issues” (p. 1). Van Gorp (2009) notes that news texts are part of an ongoing discourse that involves media producers, media consumers, and other social players in a process that helps to define and reproduce cultural values and norms (p. 88). The goal of news framing analysis is to identify the various and often competing frames being used to shape the public’s understanding of a particular issue.

Over several years, Gamson and his colleagues developed a methodology for characterizing the various ways that issues were framed in the news (Gamson, 1989; Gamson & Lasch, 1981; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). This methodology involves identifying a mix of framing and reasoning devices Gamson called the “interpretive” or “frame” package. Framing devices included metaphors, catch-phrases, and depictions used in the description of a particular issue. Reasoning devices provide explanations of causes, consequences, and appeals to principles associated with the same issue.

Building on these ideas, authors such as Entman (1993), Van Gorp (2010), and others have sought to identify the interpretive packages embedded in news stories surrounding issues

ranging from environmental regulation to charter schools. These frame packages often align with the narratives offered by public officials, politicians, interest groups, and other political actors who can be considered *frame sponsors*. Frame sponsors have a strong interest in shaping the public discourse surrounding particular issues and in the policy solutions that are eventually adopted.

A primary goal of this study is to identify the major themes embedded in the news surrounding efforts to make schools more culturally responsive. Another goal is to examine the similarities and differences in the way news organizations frame these kinds of stories depending on their intended audience. For example, major daily newspapers like *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have a large audience that includes a cross-section of the country's population. According to the Pew Research Center (2012), many daily papers "have audiences whose partisan and ideological breakdowns are fairly similar to the public's" (para. 20). At the same time, grassroots, community, and independent presses often have smaller and more ethnically homogeneous audiences based on nationality, religion, and/or language. Comparing the way major U.S. daily papers and the more focused ethnic press frame efforts to make schools more culturally responsive has the potential to yield new insights into the way media operates in different cultural settings. In the next section, I outline the steps that I took to both select and analyze the newspaper reports at the heart of this study.

### Methodology

The process of identifying the dominant themes within news coverage of particular issues requires close reading and analysis (Feuerstein, 2014; Gamson & Lasch, 1981; Van Gorp, 2005). Close reading is central to identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a goal of thematic analysis is identifying the "underlying ideas, assumption, and conceptualisations" (p.84) that go beyond the surface meaning of the data.

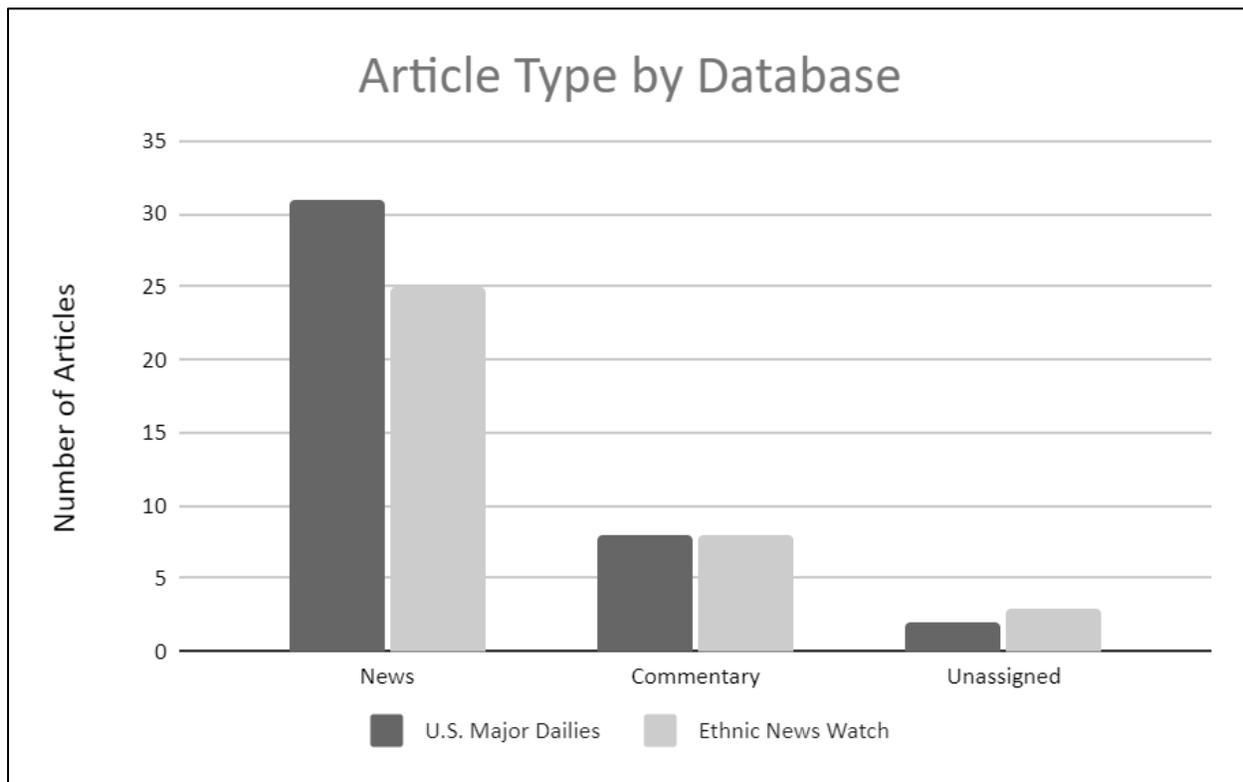
For this study, I began with news articles published from 2012 through 2020 that focused on efforts to broaden the school curriculum with a particular emphasis on Black lives. To find relevant articles, I utilized two distinct full-text ProQuest news databases. The first database, *U.S. Major Dailies*, includes *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*. These papers are all national in scope and have a broad readership while also covering local issues. The second database, *Ethnic News Watch*, covers newspapers drawn from the ethnic, minority, and native press and is aimed at providing researchers "access to essential, often overlooked perspectives" (ProQuest, n.d., para. 1). These papers have smaller audiences and are more focused on news relevant to their more targeted readership.

Using Boolean search logic, I identified all of the news articles published in these databases between January 1, 2012, and September 18, 2020, which included the term "Black lives" or "1619 Project" as well as "curriculum," "ethnic studies," "multicultural education," or "social studies." The goal of combining these terms was to limit the search results to articles that focused on efforts to address omissions and evasions in the school curriculum by including more culturally responsive content related to Black lives and Black history. This time period spanned the protests following the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012 to those taking place in the summer of 2020 following the killing of George Floyd. This search resulted in 187 articles from the *U.S. Major Dailies* database and 135 articles from the *Ethnic News Watch* database.

Next, I read each set of articles and excluded those lacking sufficient focus on K-12 curricular issues and/or educational practices. This process resulted in my selection of 41 articles

from the *U.S. Major Dailies* database and 36 from the *Ethnic News Watch* database. These articles encompassed new stories as well as commentary (sometimes referred to as editorials). The breakdown of these categories across the two samples of articles is summarized in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1**  
*Article Type by Database*



These articles were then uploaded into a qualitative analysis software package (NVIVO) for the purpose of carrying out more careful and systematic content analysis. The goal of my analysis was to identify the dominant frames used to characterize efforts to adopt more culturally responsive curricula and educational practices. I have used this process in a number of other studies focused on the framing of educational issues. For example, one study looked at the framing of “parent trigger” laws aimed at converting public schools to charter schools (Feuerstein, 2015a), while others examined the general framing of charter school reform (Feuerstein, 2014, 2015b). Similar methodologies have been employed to study the media’s representation of teachers (Goldstein, 2011). Outside of education, these methods have been used to study issues ranging from the coverage of climate change (Stecula & Merkle, 2019) to the war on terror (Reese, 2009).

Coding of the articles was carried out in a multi-step process that utilized the questions in the framing protocol below to identify the constellations of ideas (frames) used by the press to convey news about curricular issues. The use of protocols is recommended by Altheide and Schneider (2012) as a way to guide data collection and capture the meaning of text. Clarifying the characteristics of the emerging themes was an ongoing process and involved a comparative

technique, whereby coded material was constantly compared with other coded excerpts and source material in order to further refine and name the themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 1 summarizes the central elements of this protocol.

**Table 1**  
*Framing Protocol*

<b>Depiction</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● General focus of article.</li> <li>● How is the issue described?</li> <li>● Nature of the problem/issue. Is there a particular problem or issue that is emphasized?</li> <li>● Who is affected by the issue?</li> </ul>
<b>Causal roots</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is the main cause of the issue or problem?</li> <li>● Who or what is to blame/praise for the situation?</li> </ul>
<b>Solutions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What are the views on the current policy or situation?</li> <li>● What solutions are proposed or implied?</li> <li>● Who is suggested or implied as having sufficient agency to address the issue?</li> </ul>
<b>Core Values</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What values or principles are evident in the problem presentation? (e.g., choice, efficiency, quality, equality)</li> </ul>

While helpful in identifying recurring themes in the data, it is important to note that this type of protocol involves interpretation and judgment. The analysis that follows reflects my best efforts to identify the dominant frames in the news articles described above. Because elements of these frames are closely related, it was sometimes possible to code excerpts in multiple ways. In this sense, the patterns in the data were more like a web than a discrete outline, and other readers approaching this data with different questions might develop varied interpretations.

In the following section, I describe the dominant frames that emerged from my analysis of the news reports discussed earlier and provide excerpts from the data to illustrate the sub-themes embedded within each frame.

### **Analysis**

After reading and coding the articles drawn from the *U.S. Major Dailies* and the *Ethnic News Watch* databases, I identified three major types of framing concerning efforts to adopt more culturally responsive curricula and educational practices. These frames cut across articles drawn from both *U.S. Major Dailies* and the *Ethnic News Watch* databases. I've named these frames *Challenging the Dominant Narrative*; *Activism and Engaged Citizenship*; and *Defending American Heritage and Patriotism*. The first, *Challenging the Dominant Narrative*, focused on the efforts of individuals and groups to address ongoing racism within schools while also stressing the importance of teaching students more about their racial and ethnic heritage. The second frame, *Activism and Engaged Citizenship*, is related to the first but focuses more on the ways in which the BLM movement has created new ways for students, parents, teachers, and community members to engage in political action and to learn first-hand about the function of

democracy. The final frame, *Defending American Heritage and Patriotism*, encompasses the reactions and efforts of individuals and groups to defend an ideology of American exceptionalism in the face of challenges by movements like BLM.

Figure 2 below illustrates that the bulk of the articles analyzed for this study were published in 2020. The number of articles about efforts to implement more culturally responsive curriculum and educational practices has increased over time as this issue has gained greater prominence in mainstream public discourse. In addition, the number of articles in *U.S. Major Dailies* on this topic surpassed the number in the ethnic press in recent years.

**Figure 2**  
*Articles by Year of Publication and Database*

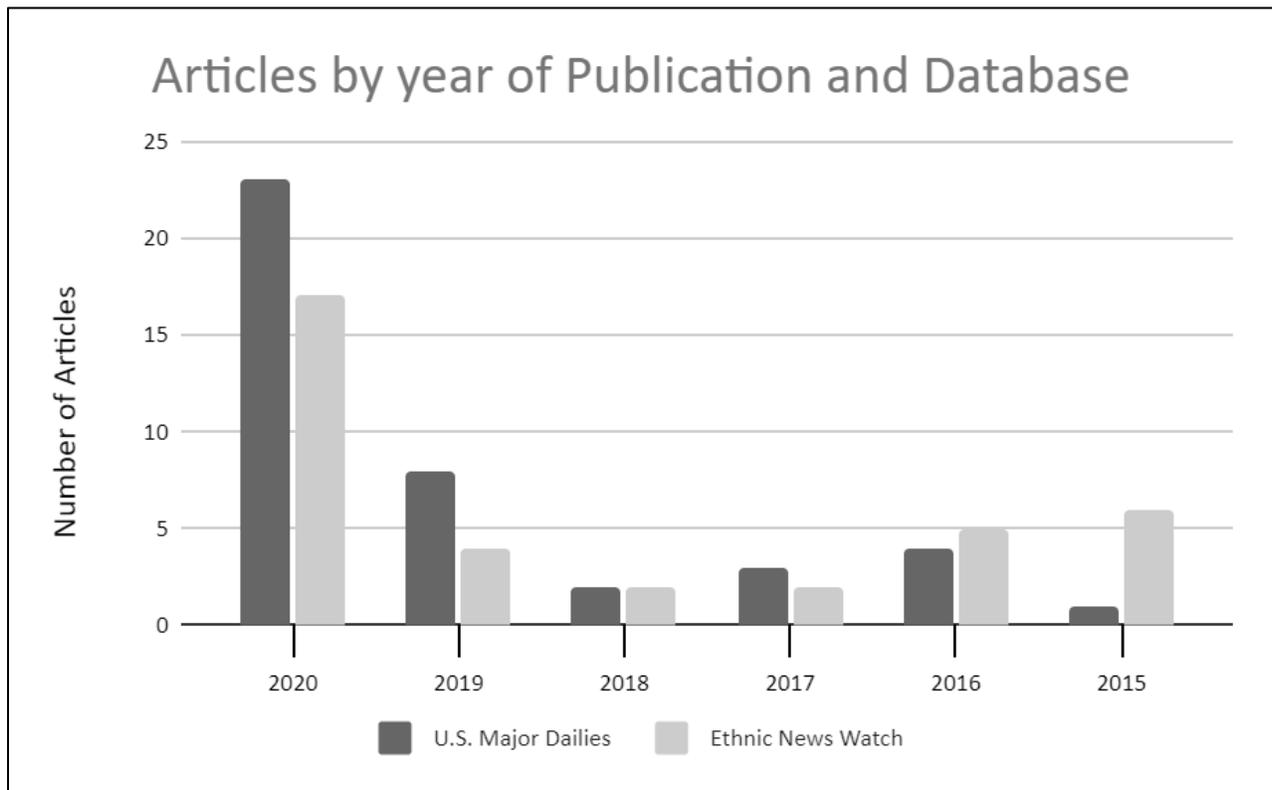
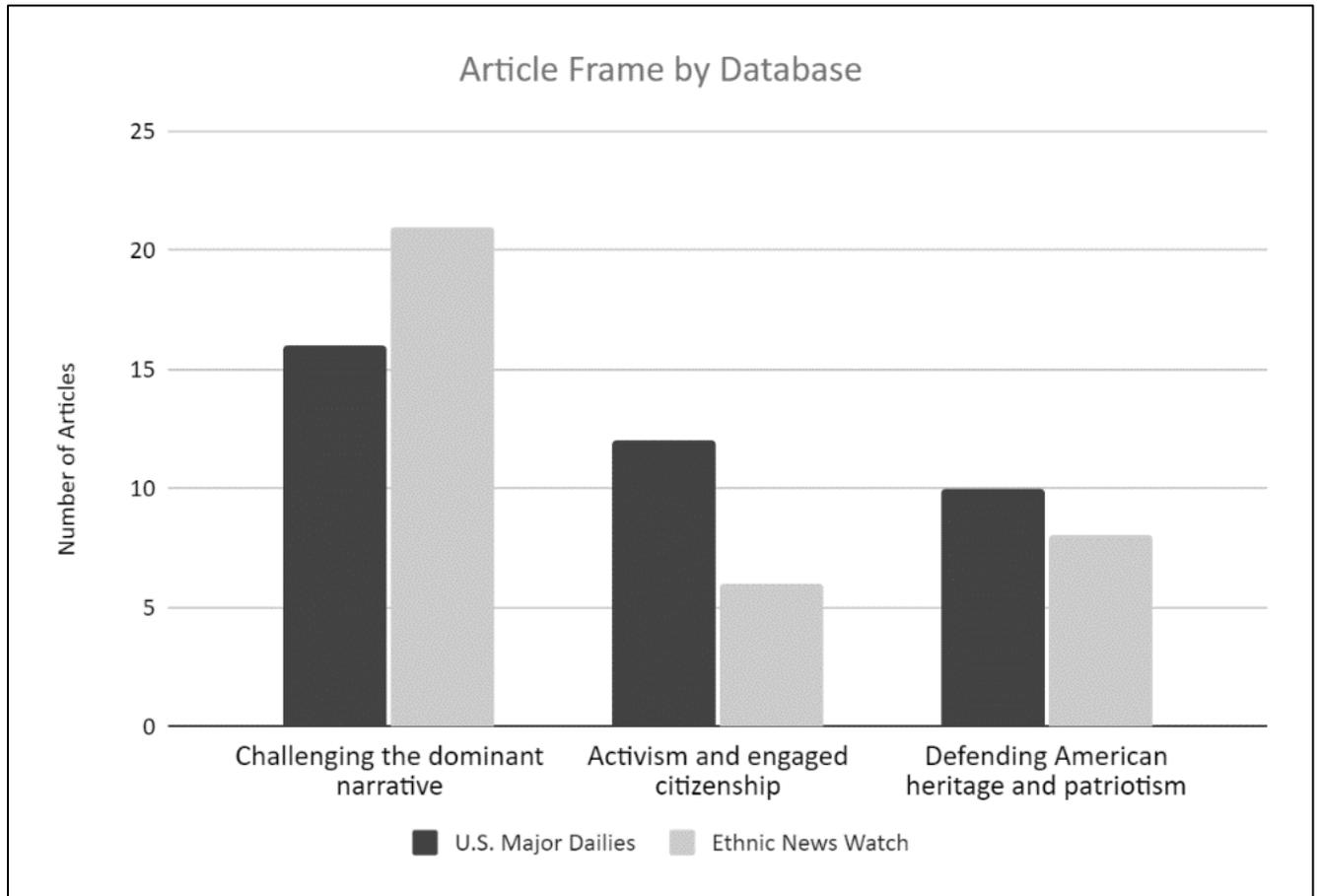


Figure 3 shows the three most common frames identified in the sample. The number of articles from each database with this framing is also indicated.

**Figure 3**  
*Article Frame by Database*



**Frame 1: Challenging the Dominant Narrative**

The most prominent framing that emerged from reading and coding the articles was centered around the idea that schools need to do more to address ongoing racism while also providing students with a deeper understanding of their racial/ethnic heritage. This framing was evident in 21 of the 36 articles drawn from the *Ethnic News Watch* database (58%) and 16 of the 41 articles drawn from the *U.S. Major Dailies* database (39%).

Looking across these articles, a common set of perspectives emerged that focused on the necessity of recognizing and addressing racist incidents in schools while also correcting systemic inequalities in the treatment of Black students and other students of color in relation to their White peers. This framing encompassed three sub-themes – *Everyday Racism*, *Systemic Racism*, and *The Importance of Being Reflected in the Curriculum*.

***Everyday Racism***

Some of the articles with this framing focused on the way teachers and students were treated in school. For example, one article in the LA Times in 2020 (Agrawal, 2020) describes what happened to a Black teacher who wore a t-shirt to class with the words “I can’t breathe”

printed on the front as a protest against the killing of Eric Garner. In this case, the father of one of her students viewed this choice as inappropriate and posted a screenshot of her wearing the shirt on social media. According to the paper, “a torrent of threats poured in on social media, frightening the teacher enough that she fled her home with her daughter and sought restraining orders against the parent and the media commentator” (Agrawal, 2020, para. 4). These threats were critiqued by school administrators and a fellow teacher who noted that “Educators need to be able to teach about racial and social injustice without threats, harassment, bullying, or scare-tactics” (Agrawal, 2020, para. 17). Such an example underscores the vulnerability of Black teachers who dare to publicly address issues of race in their classrooms.

Building on this theme, other articles emphasized the need to address the day-to-day racism endured by Black students and other students of color in both public and private schools. For example, the NYT included a story about racism in elite girls’ schools in the city where a Black alumna described her treatment while she was a student (Shapiro, E. 2020). She explained that “she had been a Chapin student for less than a month when she was pulled into an office by a staff member and asked if she had taken \$20 from a White classmate’s bag” (Shapiro, E., 2020, para. 32). Even though she explained that she had not stolen the money, her parents were called. According to the article, “The White classmate eventually found her misplaced bill” (Shapiro, E., 2020, para. 33).

These articles described both subtle and more overt instances of racism that seem to occur on an everyday basis. One article in the Washington Post (Meckler et al., 2020) provided examples from across the country:

In a school near Tacoma, Wash., a wrestling coach was fired after posting a photo of himself with another person's knee on his neck and the words "Not dead yet." A Michigan school board voted to fire its superintendent following a Facebook comment partially blaming Floyd for winding up in custody. And in rural Colorado, a student posted on Instagram a photo of a student kneeling on what looks like a young Black cow's neck, with a caption that included the name "George" and the hashtag #Icantbreathe. (para. 5)

In another article in the Washington Post from 2017 (Whitfield, 2017), a teacher from St. Louis observed that

Male students discussed how, when walking with a group of friends, being questioned by the police was commonplace. These are kids I teach daily, who horseplay in the halls, cry when a classmate takes their pencils, laugh at corny jokes and fart loudly during instruction. They're children. But when police see them, these immature boys morph into suspects. The thought of one of my students being accosted by police and shot dead makes my ears red and my blood run boiling hot. And they recount these interactions with police as if they are telling me the weather. No emotion. It's normal to them. (para. 15)

Later in the article, the author laments the fact that she can’t spend time helping her students better understand the source of this racism and must instead continue to address curricular goals and standards that seem inconsequential in relation to her students’ lives.

### ***Systemic Racism***

While many of the articles in the previous category focused on examples of racism endured by individuals along with efforts to address those issues, other articles conveyed a broader systemic focus. For example, several articles focused on California’s effort to address

widespread inequality in educational outcomes between Black and White students. One of those articles from the Sun Reporter in San Francisco in 2016 (Otiko & Muhammad, 2016) discussed a research report, *Black Minds Matter*, that focused on the academic achievement of Black students in California. The article noted the importance of such a report because it clearly demonstrated that Black students in California were “much more likely to be suspended or put into remedial or special education programs” as compared to their White peers (Otiko & Muhammad, 2016, para. 5). This article also cited the reports finding that “Only 40 percent of Black students who attend segregated (or predominantly Black) high schools in low-income areas graduate” (Otiko & Muhammad, 2016, para. 13). Such knowledge, the article suggested, was needed if these structural inequalities were to be remedied.

Other articles described the efforts of Black Lives Matter activists to get schools to adopt curricula with a greater focus on the structural and systemic nature of racism. For example, one article from The Los Angeles Times in 2020 (Smith, 2020) discussed the efforts of local activists to get their school district to adopt “a curriculum developed by Black Lives Matter, which includes lessons about structural racism, antiracism, the intersectionality of Black and queer identities, and Black history that goes beyond the 1960s” (Smith, 2020, para. 10). Other articles emphasized similar efforts to expand the curriculum to include a greater emphasis on Black history, particularly reconstruction and the United States’ legacy of racial violence and exclusion.

Several articles about curriculum focused on the 1619 Project and the Zinn Education Project, both of which were designed to help students understand more about the roots of contemporary racial conflict. For example, one teacher in a 2018 article from the Washington Post (Thomas-Lester, 2018) noted that “U.S. history is often taught in this continuous arc of improvement, but post-Reconstruction kind of destroyed that myth” and that teaching about this period helps students understand “that race-related advancements have often been followed by backlash” (Thomas-Lester, 2018, para. 18). “If you don’t teach that,” explained the teacher featured in the article

every generation thinks that the things they are going through are new... When President Trump won, I wasn't surprised at all because it fell in line with the way U.S. history has gone since the beginning. You have the election of the first Black president followed by a president who supports White supremacy. That is actually how the United States works. (Thomas-Lester, 2018, para. 19)

A similar statement was included in an article from the Michigan Chronicle in 2019 (Hunter, 2019), focusing on Detroit’s efforts to help students better understand the cause of racial division in the United States. According to the Detroit teacher interviewed in the article,

Until teachers do a better job of educating their students about the harsh realities and racial injustice of slavery, as well as the humanity and creativity of those who were enslaved, they will never be able to help students understand today's disparities in wealth, education and incarceration. (Hunter, 2019, para. 12)

Such framing suggests that knowledge about racial inequality is essential if students are to truly understand the way the United States works.

Other articles with this framing pointed out the structural impediments faced by teachers who wished to include Black history more prominently in the curriculum. For example, an article in The New York Times in 2019 (Goldstein, 2019) focused on Michigan’s efforts to reduce the amount of time dedicated to studying racial conflict within the social studies standards.

Protesting these changes, one insightful student wrote to the state board of education pleading for greater coverage of these issues. “Hiding our nation's sins isn't the right way to do it,” wrote the student, “Teach us about everything -- the good and the bad, so we can learn to think for ourselves” (Goldstein, 2019, para. 24). The student also noted that the proposed changes would leave out discussion of the practice of redlining, which enforced and amplified the segregation of cities in Michigan (Goldstein, 2019, para. 25).

### ***The Importance of Being Reflected in the Curriculum***

Finally, in addition to pointing out the need for schools and teachers to address the challenges posed by individual and systemic racism, these articles emphasized the value of school curricula that reflects Black students' history and culture. As one 2019 article from the *Afro American* in Baltimore emphasized (Jordan, 2019), Black students and students of color need to be able to understand that the version of history shared in most textbooks is incomplete. A teacher quoted in the article explains that “[a] lot of our work is centered around teaching the history that's left out of the curriculum, and ensuring from early childhood on to high, that we challenge the dominant narrative around race, class and gender,” (Jordan, 2019, para. 6). The argument here is that challenging the dominant narrative requires a curriculum that recognizes the accomplishments and contributions of Black Americans while simultaneously critiquing existing inequality.

Another example of this framing comes from a 2015 article published in Seattle's *International Examiner* (Wu, 2015) explaining the importance of teaching about the United States' history of discrimination in order to help Black students and other students of color better advocate for social justice and racial equality. According to the author,

For the majority of U.S. K-12 students, the American history that they learn are [*sic.*] about presidents, patriotism, and ideals such as liberty, democracy, and freedom. For students of color, this type of history negates their experience. Ethnic Studies give students of color the chance to learn about their history, empowering them. Once students are empowered and activated, they will begin to question the racial hierarchy, advocate for their communities, and create radical change. That's what makes Ethnic Studies so dangerous, the discipline defers to people of color and challenges White supremacy. (Wu, 2015, para. 16)

This argument emphasizes the importance of knowing one's history as a source of strength and empowerment – a central feature of this framing.

Many of the articles with this framing, 14 from the *Ethnic News Watch* database and 21 from *U.S. Major Dailies*, discuss the 1619 Project and the curriculum designed to go with it. Several of these articles explained that one of the goals of the project was to reframe the way Black citizens understand their place in America. In one of these articles, Nikole Hannah-Jones, the project's leader, asserts her hope that the project will help Black people “feel a sense of ownership over this country and a sense of pride in our resilience” (Jones in Gyarkye, 2019, para. 16). This type of framing suggests the importance of historical knowledge as a foundation for understanding contemporary issues.

Another example, published in 2018 in the *Los Angeles Times* (Kaleem, 2018), focused on efforts to implement ethnic studies programs in a wide variety of states, including Texas, Kansas, and California. This article articulated the value of surfacing history about the roots of racism and inequality in the U.S. The article emphasized the importance of ethnic studies as an antidote to the erasure and deletion of ethnic histories that often occurs in the public-school

curriculum. Emphasizing the value of ethnic studies, the author describes an ethnic studies class at Santa Monica High School in California, where

a recent lesson revolved around students discussing activism against gentrification in Boyle Heights, where art galleries and coffee shops have attracted White and more well-off newcomers in the traditionally Mexican American, working-class neighborhood. (Kaleem, 2018, para. 17)

According to the article, such discussions help students explore multiple viewpoints and challenge students to think critically about their communities:

The class really challenges you to think about your identity yourself,” said Diana Hernandez, a Mexican American sophomore. “It helps us make more sense of what we’re learning throughout the school day. (Kaleem, 2018, para. 21)

Consistent with the sentiment expressed here, many of the articles with this framing emphasized the need for students to have access to accurate knowledge of past injustices so that they might better understand current issues.

While *The Importance of Being Reflected in the Curriculum* framing was found in articles from both datasets, there were 21 articles with this framing in the *Ethnic News Watch* dataset, but only 16 in the *U.S. Major Dailies*. Such a difference in framing between these datasets might be explained by differences in the intended audiences of the newspapers included in each set. For example, many of the articles in papers such as The Washington Red Star, The International Examiner, and The Philadelphia Tribune, as well as other papers included in the *Ethnic News Watch* database, are written to address the concerns of Black readers and the members of ethnic groups. These concerns often include issues such as racism and inequality in American society. News in the mainstream press also addresses these concerns but may do so in ways intended to resonate with a Whiter audience. According to the Pew Research Center (2014), White readers make up the largest proportion of daily newspaper readership at 33%, while Black readers make up 28%, and Spanish/Hispanic readers make up 20%.

## **Frame 2: Activism and Engaged Citizenship**

The second most prominent frame cutting across articles in both datasets focused on the role of Black Lives Matter in promoting opportunities for engaged citizenship, such as participation in protests, petitions, and teaching that emphasized the democratic process. This frame positioned schools as institutions with the capacity to address and potentially curb racism. There were 18 total articles with this framing: 12 were from *U.S. Major Dailies* databases, and six were from the *Ethnic News Watch* database. The first category below, *BLM is Driving Positive Change* included articles focused on developing the capacity for collective action and activism. The second category, *Curbing Racism at School*, focused on articles discussing school-based efforts to address systemic racism. The third category, *Counselors not Cops*, included articles aimed at defunding school safety officers.

### ***BLM is Driving Positive Change***

Several examples in this category focused on the actions of students, student groups, teachers, and schools to further aspects of the BLMS agenda, such as ending “zero tolerance” discipline and including Black history and ethnic studies in the school curriculum. For example, an article in the Los Angeles Sentinel in 2020 (Keller, 2020) described a rally held by El Segundo High School students in Los Angeles to communicate a set of desired changes in the way the school district operates. According to a student quoted in the article,

The Students for Change Coalition came up with a short list of demands that was somewhat promoted during various segments, such as, a request to modify curriculum, a better diverse faculty, and the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy... Natasha Lee, a senior at ESHS, called for More Hispanic and P.O.C. teachers in our faculty, so [the student-body] can see themselves represented. And integrate Black and Indigenous history into our curriculum because that history is our American history! (Keller, 2020, para. 8)

This focus on changing school culture and curriculum illustrates the connection between increased levels of student activism and the efforts of BLMS. This theme was also illustrated by a 2015 article in the New York Amsterdam News (Ashby, 2015) focused on a rally held by students at Baltimore's Academy for the College Bound. In this rally, the author explains that students

held handmade signs, some with the names of young lives lost, such as Mike Brown and Tamir Rice. Signs stating, "The dead cannot cry out for justice, it is a duty of the living to do so for them" and "Black Lives Matter" were held high. (Ashby, 2015)

Here, the author notes that the students in this school had studied the news and were familiar with the circumstances surrounding the deaths of Sandra Bland, Trayvon Martin, and Freddie Gray.

Another article from 2015 in the Milwaukee Courier (Vaccaro, 2015) describes a school protest in response to the killing of Freddie Gray. The article focuses on the efforts of an eighth-grade social studies class that "took to the sidewalk, donning handmade signs, chanting the words 'Black lives matter; stop the violence!'" (Vaccaro, 2015, para. 3). The article describes the teacher's purpose in bringing his students to the protest as follows:

To Conley, the march was dual-purposed. It allowed students to live their lessons on the First Amendment -- the right to peaceably assemble and the right to free speech. Not only that, but being able to experience protest first-hand as a participant gave students insight on what current issues require their attention and their efforts as nonviolent protestors. (Vaccaro, 2015, para. 5)

In this case, as in other articles in this category, teachers are described as using protests as opportunities for students to better understand their civics lessons by engaging directly in political action.

This perspective is also evident in a 2019 article in the NYTs focusing on youth activists (Shapiro, 2019). This article described the actions of several youth leaders active in community politics. One student named Aliyah is described as "joining protests and rallies as part of the New York Civil Liberties Union's youth activism program" (Shapiro, 2019, para. 25). She is also described as having attended a Black Lives Matter rally that inspired her to get more involved. According to the article,

She wants her friends back in the Bronx to experience fewer arrests and suspensions in schools, for their metal detectors to be removed and for them to stop having to face police officers in schools. (Shapiro, 2019, para. 26).

Articles with this framing emphasized the way Black Lives Matter inspired young activists to get involved. In another example, from The Washington Post (Lumpkin, 2020), students were described as being "[m]otivated by the death of George Floyd, and eager to ride the national momentum generated by movements like Black Lives Matter" (Lumpkin, 2020, para. 4). In this particular case, the students wanted to get more involved in school politics so that they could

“demand that Maryland schools rewrite their curriculum to be more honest about systemic racism and slavery” (Lumpkin, 2020, para. 4).

### ***Curbing Racism at School***

Many of these articles were also framed around the need to address racism in schools and challenge the racist treatment of Black and minoritized youth by peers, teachers, and school administrators. Several articles highlighted the efforts of student advocates to make schooling more equitable. For example, a 2020 article in the Washington Post describes one teacher who “helped organize a virtual conversation about race and inequity” (Meckler, et. al., 2020, para. 1) where White and Black students were grouped together for initial conversation but also had White students and Black students discussing issues in homogeneous groups. In these discussions

The White students talked about participating in protests during the pandemic and how to support Black students without overstepping. Black students spoke about their frustration that institutional racism doesn't end, despite protest after protest. (Meckler et al., 2020, para. 12)

Such examples emphasize schools as places where differences in perspectives around race can be explored and worked out in a peaceful manner.

In another example from 2020 in the Chicago Tribune (Elbaum, 2020) a letter to the editor following the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis explains the pivotal role that social studies education could play in helping students challenge racism:

As Americans watched the police brutality in Minneapolis, and the civil unrest that has followed, social studies educators were hopeful that their students could put the events into a broader perspective. U.S. history students should be able to see the parallel to America's long-standing reckoning with racial division, dating to 1619. Civics students should be able to marshal their emotions into civic actions such as protesting, letter-writing, lobbying local officials and organizing to effect change. Geography students should be able to understand how political and economic decisions have influenced cultural and environmental characteristics in certain neighborhoods and regions.

(Elbaum, 2020, para. 3)

Here again, this excerpt reinforces the idea that public schools can prepare students to both understand racism and address it through civic action.

### ***Counselors not Cops***

Many of the articles were also critical of the role of police in schools and raised questions about whether or not police presence was beneficial. Examples of the kinds of questions raised by these articles can be observed in a 2015 piece published in the Washington Post (Brown, 2015). This article focused on the large number of school resource officers (43,000) and security guards (39,000) and connected these statistics with a long list of problematic and high-profile police actions in schools, such as the following:

A Florida school police officer was arrested and charged with child abuse in June for allegedly slamming a 13-year-old student to the ground and twisting his arm. In August, the American Civil Liberties Union sued a Kentucky sheriff after a deputy was caught on camera handcuffing disabled children who didn't follow directions. And in September, a federal judge ruled that school police in Birmingham, Ala., had used unconstitutional and excessive force when they routinely pepper-sprayed children for minor disciplinary

infractions -- including a pregnant student whose offense was crying in a hallway. (Brown, 2015, para. 9)

The framing here suggests that incidents such as these, and the disproportionate number of disciplinary actions brought against Black students and other students of color, have led students, parents, and others to demand that school funding for resource officers be reduced. Such critique is consistent with BLMS's effort to reduce funding for school resource officers in the hope that the funds saved will be able to support more school counselors.

This desire to replace mechanisms of punishment and control with greater support and counseling is also represented in the following excerpt drawn from a 2020 article in the Boston Banner (Miller, 2020). This excerpt describes Boston Teachers Union President Jessica Tang's efforts to convince school officials to reduce police presence in the schools:

"We believe counselors need to be a higher funding priority over theoretically increasing the number of police in schools," Tang told School Committee members. "With limited budgets and cuts we believe adequate access to social-emotional well-being, restorative practices and other efforts are more effective than increasing police presence in our schools." Tang joined dozens of teachers and students from BPS schools at the School Committee meeting who wore Black Lives Matter tee-shirts. While not affiliated with the national Black Lives Matter movement, the local effort is part of a national movement of teachers advocating against policies they say harm Black children. (Miller, 2020, para. 8)

Such framing suggests that the problems experienced by Black students and other students of color at the hands of school police justify a reconsideration of the way that limited school funds should be spent.

### **Frame 3: Defending American Heritage and Patriotism**

Another prominent frame found in the news articles analyzed for this study centered on defending an ideology of American exceptionalism in the face of critiques by activists and scholars. Of the 18 articles with this framing, ten were from *U.S. Major Dailies* databases and eight from the *Ethnic News Watch* database. Many articles exhibited what some journalists have described as a "Whitelash" narrative. This term, which implies a White backlash against racial progress, was first used by the journalist Van Jones in his effort to explain why President Trump was elected immediately following the Presidency of Barak Obama (Ryan, 2016).

Articles with this framing included a focus on the concerns of conservative Whites and other groups who believe that highlighting inequality and ongoing injustice tarnishes the image of the United States and encourages students to adopt the identity of victims rather than self-motivated individuals (Will, 2020). Articles with this framing suggest that it is better for students to understand what is admirable about the country and its founding values than it is to understand past wrongs and enduring inequalities. Such a view has been frequently communicated by President Trump. In a statement in October 2020, just prior to the presidential election, he expressed his view that "the United States of America is the most just and exceptional Nation ever to exist on Earth," and schools should play a more active role in furthering this belief (Trump, 2020b, para. 1).

In analyzing these articles, it became clear that there were several distinct perspectives supporting this overarching view of American exceptionalism. These perspectives included the belief that efforts to address racism were divisive, fears that students were being indoctrinated with liberal perspectives, and general optimism about the benefits associated with patriotic and pro-American education.

One important caveat influencing this analysis is that all seven of the articles with this framing identified in the *Ethnic News Watch* database came from a single New York-based newspaper: *The Epoch Times*. According to Roose (2020), writing in the New York Times, *The Epoch Times* is associated with the Falun Gong religious movement. According to the paper's founder, it was developed in response to censorship and persecution of the Falun Gong movement – a religious movement originating in China. *The Epoch Times* is highly critical of the Communist Party in China and supports conservative and far-right political perspectives. According to Roose (2020), “The Epoch Times and its affiliates are a force in right-wing media, with tens of millions of social media followers spread across dozens of pages and an online audience that rivals those of The Daily Caller and Breitbart News” (para. 6). Such an overt conservative perspective is inconsistent with most of the other newspapers included in the *Ethnic News Watch* database. More typically, as shown in the sections above, the papers in this database support more liberal and left-leaning positions.

### ***Addressing Racism is Problematic and Divisive***

Articles with this framing generally critiqued the efforts of educators and others wishing to address racism by broadening the school curriculum to include more Black history and a better understanding of the nature of systemic racism. For example, one commentary in *The Epoch Times* (Bauerlein, 2019) described such efforts as paving the way for the adoption of socialism in the United States. According to the author

Fifty years of revisionist history, multiculturalist literature and art classes, “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western Civ has got to go!” Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, Black Studies, Native American Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Queer Theory have done their job. They have created a different America, a wicked one. They don’t speak of the “Miracle at Philadelphia,” as the Constitutional Convention was once labeled. They don’t appreciate the fact that in 1800 and in 1900, the United States was the most diverse country in the world, nor do they honor the United States for fighting Germany and Japan, the most venomously ethnocentric nations at that time. The American past is, instead, a ledger of national crimes. (Bauerlein, 2019, para. 9)

This mocking tone suggests that efforts to address inequality are unnecessary. Moreover, the author advances the idea that multicultural history and literature make students think less of the United States.

In several articles exhibiting this framing, the 1619 Project is singled out as being particularly problematic because it provides a view of American history that challenges the idea of American exceptionalism and continuous progress. According to one author, the 1619 project is “a deliberate effort by The New York Times to displace the moral authority of the signing of the Declaration of Independence as the heart of America's founding” (Humphrey, 2019, para. 2). This same article suggests, “We should see the 1619 Project for what it is: part of a comprehensive attempt at political revolution. It seeks to transform the American republican regime, which is based on equal rights for individuals, into one defined by identity politics and the unequal treatment of identity groups” (Humphrey, 2019, para. 5). This framing suggests that efforts to educate students about the history of various racial and ethnic groups within the United States are destructive because it produces rancor among students as they begin to recognize patterns of injustice.

This framing is also partially evident in several articles included in the *U.S. Major Dailies* database, some of which reported on President Trump’s concern that “American schools

have become infected with revisionist ideas about the nation's founding and history, producing a new generation of 'Marxist' activists and adherents of 'critical race theory' who believe American society to be fundamentally racist and wicked -- and who have taken to the streets in recent months" (Crowley, 2020, para. 8). While this article also critiqued President Trump as becoming increasingly "unhinged," elements of the article reflected the idea that those on the right perceive efforts to expand what is taught in school as part of a broader effort to destabilize American society.

This point of view is also evident in the following example from the Wall Street Journal (Wall Street Journal Editorial Board, 2020) critiquing California's efforts to develop an ethnic studies curriculum for public schools. According to the article,

Enforced identity politics and 'intersectionality' are on their way to replacing civic nationalism as America's creed. Liberals who consider themselves moderate and don't understand the sense of urgency and assault felt by so many Americans ought to read this curriculum. (Wall Street Journal Editorial Board, 2020, para. 7)

Other articles with this frame go so far as to suggest that "Barraging minorities with constant reminders of the injuries their ancestors suffered only discourages them from working to surmount the obstacles in their way" (Woodson, 2019, para. 4). Here again, is the idea that efforts to recognize inequality are more problematic than the underlying inequality itself.

Overall, this framing advances the view that efforts to teach students about historical injustices will create deeper divisions and problems for American society. Rather than teach students about racial inequality, this framing suggests that educators should work to establish a universal sense of civic identity that transcends race and ethnicity.

### ***Concerns About Indoctrination***

A second concern within this framing suggests that students are being, or might be, indoctrinated with left-leaning ideologies that would lead to the adoption of socialism or possibly communism in the United States. For example, one author in *The Epoch Times* makes a comparison between current efforts to broaden the school curriculum and the strategy thought to be used by communists to sow discord in the United States during the Cold War (Holmquist, 2020). The author quotes *The Naked Communist*, an anti-communist book written in 1958, to illustrate what she believes is now occurring in public schools.

Get control of the schools. Use them as transmission belts for socialism and current Communist propaganda. Soften the curriculum. Get control of teachers' associations. Put the party line in textbooks... We've had not a little experience with riots and protests lately, many of which have been heavily attended by young people. Are they mere tools in the hands of an ideology we don't realize is pulling the strings? (Holmquist, 2020, para. 3-5)

Such a perspective reveals the fear held by some conservatives that left-leaning teachers and schools will indoctrinate and manipulate students in an effort to undermine traditional democratic and capitalist ideologies.

This framing is evident in several articles from the *U.S. Major Dailies* database that focus on President Trump's concerns about school curriculum. According to one article, "President Trump pressed his case ... that U.S. schools are indoctrinating children with a left-wing agenda hostile to the nation's Founding Fathers, describing efforts to educate students about racism and slavery as an insult to the country's lofty founding principles" (Balingit & Meckler, 2020, para. 1). The president is quoted as saying, "Patriotic moms and dads are going to demand that their

children are no longer fed hateful lies about this country... American parents are not going to accept indoctrination in our schools, cancel culture at work or the repression of traditional faith, culture, and values in the public square. Not anymore” (Balingit & Meckler, 2020, para. 5). A similar editorial in the Wall Street Journal, focusing on supporters of Senator Bernie Sanders, summed up this perspective in its title: *Young adults today received a steady diet of social-justice, secular-progressive and climate-change dogma from grade school to graduate school* (Peters, 2020). Within the article, the author maintains that

If you are blessed to be born in a country that has outperformed the world for 400 years and still offers better prospects for a comfortable lifestyle than any other nation, and you think the country needs a radical makeover by Bernie Sanders, you were punked by the left-wing ideologues teaching your social-studies classes. (Peters, 2020)

The suggestion that social studies teachers are radicals pushing a socialist, communist, and anti-American agenda underscores the growing distrust of public institutions. This discourse has pitted those who would like to see greater recognition of diverse perspectives and identities in American society against those who are intent on preserving traditional perspectives and values that privilege Whites.

### ***Patriotic and Pro-American Education***

Several articles with this pro-American and patriotic framing highlighted the president’s effort to “restore patriotic education to our schools” (Crowley, 2020, para. 2). Some of these articles featured President Trump’s plan to develop, with the aid of conservative historians, an overtly pro-American curriculum. He titled the group working on this curriculum the “1776 Commission” so as to commemorate the American Revolution and also challenge the “1619 Project” described earlier. In one of these articles, President Trump explains his belief that this project will “encourage our educators to teach our children about the miracle of American history and make plans to honor the 250th anniversary of our founding” (Crowley, 2020, para. 18).

Supporting this patriotic approach to education, one article in the Wall Street Journal reported on an interview with E.D. Hirsch, the conservative English Professor and founder of the Core Knowledge Foundation (Schaefer-Riley, 2020). Hirsch’s most recent book is titled *How to Educate a Citizen*. Hirsch is described in the article as agreeing with the sentiments of political scientist Richard Rorty, who believed that “In the name of 'the politics of difference,' [the left] refuses to rejoice in the country it inhabits. It repudiates the idea of a national identity, and the emotion of national pride” (Rorty in Schaefer-Riley, 2020, para. 8). Following up on this idea, Hirsch explains that “[p]atriotism is important because we want to make our society work” (Hirsch in Schaefer-Riley, 2020, para. 12).

Another piece published in the Wall Street Journal (Fields, 2020) provides a similar perspective on the importance of traditional values. According to this author, “Public schools today—like the ones using “1619” in their curriculum—rely on one-size-fits-all secular humanistic indoctrination to dumb down American children and drive wedges between them and their parents” (Fields, 2020, para. 8). To remedy this attack on traditional values, the author suggests that,

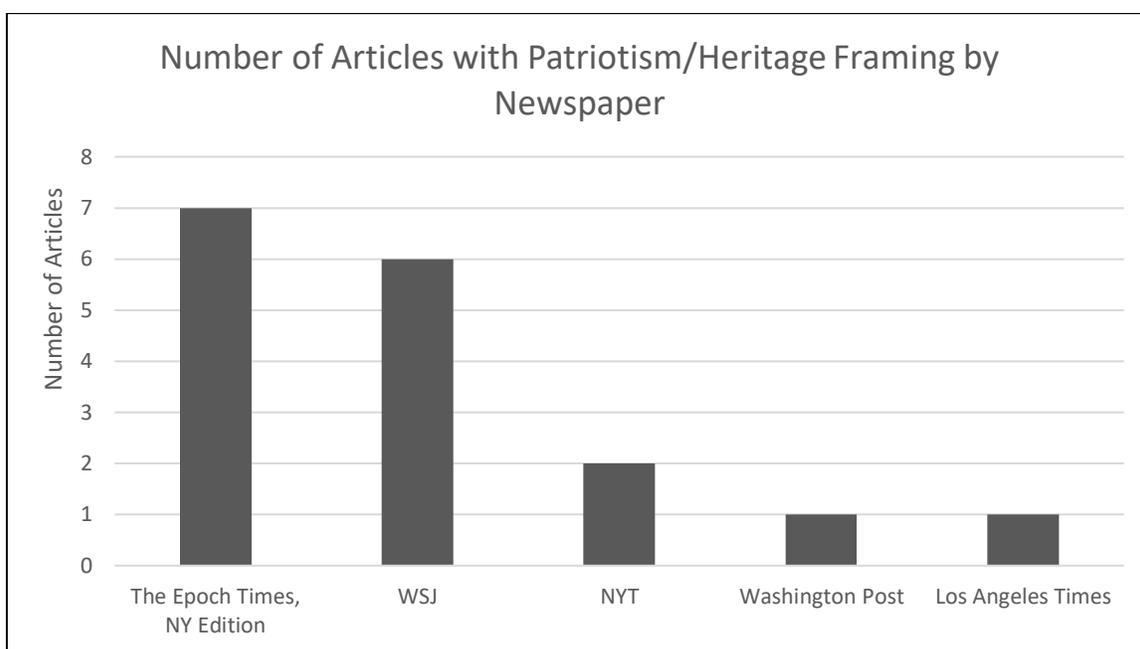
We must safeguard our children's innocence by opposing the false prophets of our day while constructing a viable alternative for them. This project entails returning to our first love, Judeo-Christian values, and our first principles of liberty and justice codified in the Declaration of Independence by imperfect but prescient men. (Fields, 2020, para. 11)

This kind of patriotic rhetoric, couched in Biblical terms, demonstrates the underlying sense among a segment of the population that traditional values are under attack and must be reinforced if they are to be preserved for the next generation. Such perspectives fail to acknowledge the role of race in perpetuating present-day inequality.

Looking at the *Defending American Patriotism and Heritage* frame across datasets reveals that, except for articles published in the conservative *Epoch Times*, there were no other articles drawn from the *Ethnic News Watch* database that reflected this point of view. Looking at the *U.S. Major Dailies* database, six of ten articles with patriotic framing were published in the *Wall Street Journal*. The number of articles with this type of patriotic framing by news source is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4**

*Number of Articles with Patriotism/Heritage Framing by Newspaper*



### Conclusions

If one steps back from the close reading of the news presented above, it is possible to detect the outlines of two competing narratives. The first narrative is about efforts to recognize and address systemic injustice and racism. This story encompasses the first two frames identified in my analysis, *Changing the Dominant Narrative* and *Activism and Engaged Citizenship*. Both of these frames highlight the effort of students, teachers, and parents to address various forms of racism as they work toward realizing the, as yet unfulfilled, ideals of the Declaration of Independence. Such ideals, explains Beach (Beach, 2007), include “equality; inalienable rights; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; government ruled by the consent of the governed; laws for public good and principles of freedom for all” (p. 160). The second narrative emphasizes the role of schools in developing a strong national identity as a strategy to promote civic and political stability. This narrative is at the core of the third frame identified in my analysis, *Defending American Heritage and Patriotism*.

Understood from a historical perspective, these narratives align closely with two long-standing perspectives on the American dream. These views, explains Beach (2007), are as old as the nation itself yet still resonate in the modern-day. From one perspective, the American dream is seen as being radically egalitarian and focused on the moral imperative of achieving greater equality and broader access to opportunity. From the other perspective, the American dream is understood as being more focused on maintaining the social order through meritocratic processes. These contrasting visions of the American Dream have been invoked by competing political interests for generations as they seek to legitimate their desired approach to education.

According to the conservative view of the American Dream, the nation has made sufficient efforts to address past discrimination; the remaining social inequality is simply the result of a fair and well-functioning meritocracy. This view has informed efforts in as many as forty-one states to limit public schools' ability to offer ethnic studies, diversity training, or to discuss concepts such as racism and sexism in particular ways (Schwartz, 2021). However, such a view ignores centuries of discrimination and existing inequalities that track too closely to racial boundaries for this assertion to hold.

To some degree, the *Defending American Heritage and Patriotism* frame rests on White grievances about supposed “reverse discrimination.” While popular on the right, such a view lacks empirical support and fails to consider how the idea of meritocracy might serve as a cover for systemic injustice and structural racism (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004). Moreover, many in the BLM movement believe that public schools have not done nearly enough to help students understand that racial discrimination has been and continues to be a defining feature of American society.

While the BLM movement has largely been concerned with inequalities in policing based on race, its efforts have also raised questions about inequality in many social spheres ranging from issues of economic status to sexual identity, gender identity, disability, and inequality in public education. Through sustained political action, this movement has demanded that the United States consider the various ways that Black lives have been devalued. In doing so, the movement has provided further support for the egalitarian version of the American Dream focused on creating a more equal society. Part of this vision rests on efforts to make the school curriculum and educational practices more culturally relevant. Along these lines, the historian Jill Lepore (2022) reports that since 2020 seventeen states have made efforts in this direction which expand the teaching of anti-racist history.

As the BLM movement has gained momentum, it has also created anxiety among those interested in maintaining the status quo. Supporting this perspective, Waldstreicher (2020), addressing a conservative critique of the 1619 Project, observed that efforts to reconsider historical questions such as whether or not the American Revolution was truly anti-slavery are often met with resistance because they have the potential to empower the disenfranchised. Such backlash is easily observed within the articles conforming to the *Defending American Heritage and Patriotism* frame. One clear example is former President Trump’s creation of the 1776 Commission in order to promote “patriotic” education. This move can be interpreted as a not-so-subtle effort to restore “traditional” values in the public schools and bolster meritocracy. Such a move, however, also conveys the president’s fear that he and his supporters are quickly losing their grip on some of the systems that have successfully conveyed status and privilege to a narrow (i.e., White) segment of the American population

Based on my analysis, stories reflecting both versions of the American Dream can be found in the mainstream press as well as the more narrowly focused ethnic press. However, my

findings suggest that these stories are not equally represented in each dataset. I found more stories with the *Changing the Dominant Narrative* frame in the articles from the *Ethnic News Watch* database (See Figure 1, above) than in the *U.S. Major Dailies* database. Except for articles from *The Epoch Times*, there was also a greater focus on the egalitarian version of the American dream in news articles from the *Ethnic News Watch* database than in the *U.S. Major Dailies* database. While it is difficult to discern an overarching pattern in these differences, they make sense, given the intended audience of these news outlets. For example, the fact that Black and ethnic newspapers would be more likely to print articles framed around *Challenging the Dominant Narrative*—a framing that recognizes anti-Black racism and injustice makes more sense than framing that conforms with *Defending American Heritage and Patriotism*, which likely resonates more strongly with Whiter audiences.

The stakes in this ideological struggle are high. As the BLM protests in the summer of 2020 involving over half a million people (Buchanan et al., 2020) demonstrate, public debate regarding the true nature of the American dream endures. As the divisions in our society grow, developing a stronger understanding of the role of the news media in shaping public sentiment becomes more important. As Shannon (2011) explains, news frames often compete with each other for dominance and have the power to shape our thoughts and actions. Our ability to understand the way that news framing shapes discourse and ultimately our perceptions is an important factor influencing our ability to decide which vision of the American dream should ultimately prevail.

The efforts of BLM and other groups to press for social, political, and educational change have emphasized the cause of social justice. While an increased focus on social justice in the mainstream media is welcome, the backlash is strong, and citizens are far from united in a common vision of the American Dream. Given the divisions in our society, it is incumbent on educators to help the public discern and grapple with the competing frames frequently concealed in the news.

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## Appendix A

### *Articles Used in the Analysis from the ProQuest Ethnic News Watch Database*

<b>Date of Publication</b>	<b>City of Publication</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Article Title</b>
5/9/2015	MIL	Milwaukee Courier	Eighth-Graders Protest for School and Black Lives
7/25/2015	MIL	Milwaukee Courier	Student to UWM Mentor: 'Thank You for Being a Role Model'
8/5/2015	Seattle	International Examiner	Connecting disproportionality, achievement to educational policies and practices
8/13/2015	NYC	New York Amsterdam News	Children march for peace
11/4/2015	Seattle	International Examiner	The Elephant is still in the Room: Race and the Backlash Against Ethnic Studies
12/3/2015	Jacksonville FL	The Jacksonville Free Press	Will Race be an Issue in the 2016 Election?
2/4/2016	NYC	New York Beacon	Why we celebrate Black History Month
2/11/2016	Jackson Miss.	Jackson Advocate	What's needed: Black history with a purpose
2/18/2016	San Fran	Sun Reporter	Black Minds Matter Movement: California Is Failing Black Students
5/5/2016	Whippany, NJ	Jewish News	'Justice educator' on 'white skin' privilege
10/3/2016	New OrL.	The Louisiana Weekly	NAACP, BAE0 at odds of charter schools
3/24/2017	IND	The Indianapolis Recorder	Revolutionary reading
4/1/2017	MIL	Milwaukee Courier	Vote April 4 For Children, Curriculum, Culture, Community
1/31/2018	SEAT and PORT	The Skanner	Black Lives Matter Vancouver Seeks Volunteers
2/17/2018	BALT	Afro-American	Local School Teach Black Lives Matter
2/16/2019	WDC	Afro-American Red Star	School Week of Action Brings Go Go, Education
8/20/2019	NYC	The Epoch Times	The 1619 Project and the Fight for the Minds and Hearts of American Children
9/18/2019	MICH	Michigan Chronicle	1619 Project Discussion Sails into Detroit
11/21/2019	NYC	The Epoch Times	The nation must be re-educated!
1/25/2020	MIL	Milwaukee Courier	We've Come Too Far to Turn Around: Why Milwaukeeans Should Support MPS' Referendum

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<b>Date of Publication</b>	<b>City of Publication</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Article Title</b>
2/13/2020	BOS	The Boston Banner	Teachers give lesson on Black Lives Matter
2/20/2020	LA	Los Angeles Sentinel	Author and Historian, Blair Imani Sheds Light on Great Migration
3/20/2020	NYC	The Epoch Times	Bob Woodson and the Birth of the 1776 Initiative
6/4/2020	LA	Los Angeles Sentinel	The Heinous Murder of George Floyd and Race in America
6/24/2020	Dearfield Beach, FL	Jewish Journal	Alumni call on Jewish day schools to do more to fight against racism
7/3/2020	IND	The Indianapolis Recorder	IPS created racial equity policy
7/9/2020	LA	Los Angeles Sentinel	Students for Change Rally at Library Park
7/14/2020	PHI	Philadelphia Tribune	Philly school district right to pursue anti-racism initiative
7/26/2020	PHI	Philadelphia Tribune	Senator targets funding for teaching 1619 Project
8/1/2020	MIA	Caribbean Today	Caribbean American candidate wants black history education
8/4/2020	NYC	The Epoch Times	Let's Take Back Our Schools
8/5/2020	NYC	The Epoch Times	The 1958 'Psychological Warfare' Plan Playing Out Before Us
8/13/2020	BOS	The Boston Banner	A hopscotch step backwards?
9/1/2020	NYC	The Epoch Times	LOVE IS THE ANSWER MAKING AMERICA GREAT AGAIN
9/17/2020	WDC	Washington Informer	Has 'Unhinged Trump' Secured 'Political Popularity' Through Racist Tropes?
9/22/2020	NYC	The Epoch Times	Kids Must Learn History to Avoid Being Gaslighted by Media

**Appendix B**

*Articles Used in the Analysis from the ProQuest U.S. Major Dailies Database*

<b>Date of Publication</b>	<b>City of Publication</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Article Title</b>
8/2/2016	NYC	NYT	At School, a 'March' Through the Civil Rights Movement in Visual Detail
8/21/2016	NYC	NYT	Condemnation of Charter Schools Exposes a Rift Among Black Americans
9/18/2016	NYC	NYT	Readers' Stories About Race and Education
10/19/2016	NYC	NYT	Teaching Seventh Graders in a Shocking Election Season
2/19/2017	NYC	NYT	When the Equation Is Unequal
5/9/2017	WDC	Washington Post	Driver's ed in Va. to teach about traffic stops
10/8/2017	WDC	Washington Post	Facing racism is part of life in St. Louis - and my classroom
1/15/2018	WDC	Washington Post	Drawing lessons from largely forgotten history
2/16/2018	LA	Los Angeles Times	Ethnic studies programs thriving; National tensions over race and immigration fuel the curriculum trend in public schools.
4/8/2019	NYC	NYT	A More Perfect Civics Lesson? 'Democracy' Itself Is Up for Debate
8/18/2019	NYC	NYT	How The 1619 Project Came Together
8/18/2019	LA	Los Angeles Times	Ethnic studies to get another look;
8/21/2019	LA	Los Angeles Times	Expansion would hobble ethnic studies, critics say
8/23/2019	LA	Los Angeles Times	War of words delays ethnic studies bill; An ethnic studies requirement for all high school students in California is placed on hold.
8/29/2019	NYC	WSJ	The 1619 Project' Hurts Blacks
9/5/2019	NYC	NYT	Change From Within: City's Students Are on the Front Lines
11/25/2019	NYC	NYT	Teacher Threw Away Students' Black Lives Matter Posters, the A.C.L.U. Says
1/24/2020	LA	Los Angeles Times	Glendale Unified may add Black Lives Matter Week; Board discusses holding observance in February to cultivate pride and self-worth.
2/19/2020	NYC	WSJ	Upward Mobility: A Bid to Revise the New York Times's Bad History

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<b>Date of Publication</b>	<b>City of Publication</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Article Title</b>
2/19/2020	NYC	NYT	Why the Big Swarms of Young Sandernistas?
6/8/2020	Chicago	Chicago Tribune	Voice of the People
6/12/2020	WDC	Washington Post	Protests provide teachable moments
6/13/2020	NYC	NYT	Some Districts Remove Police from the Schools, Seeing Them as a Threat
6/17/2020	NYC	NYT	Elite NYC Girls' Schools Have a Racist Culture, Black Alumni Say
6/17/2020	LA	Los Angeles Times	Activists, students, parents rally to eliminate L.A. school police;
6/20/2020	WDC	Washington Post	Baltimore students press for anti-racist curriculum
7/21/2020	LA	Los Angeles Times	Who gets to be called an 'activist'?
8/1/2020	LA	Los Angeles Times	1619 Project Discussion Sails into Detroit
8/2/2020	LA	Los Angeles Times	Accounts of racism spur change at elite L.A. schools
8/2/2020	WDC	Washington Post	The lies our textbooks told my generation of Virginians about slavery
8/20/2020	NYC	WSJ	The Left Still Blames America First
8/28/2020	LA	Los Angeles Times	T-shirt ignites threats against teacher
8/31/2020	NYC	WSJ	California's Radical Indoctrination
9/7/2020	NYC	NYT	Lightfoot: Trump's threat to cut funding to districts that teach '1619 Project' is 'hot air'
9/9/2020	Chicago	Chicago Tribune	Lightfoot: Trump's threat to cut funding to districts that teach '1619 Project' is 'hot air'
9/9/2020	LA	Los Angeles Times	Trump's diversity training issues
9/11/2020	NYC	WSJ	God, Parents and the '1619 Project'
9/12/2020	NYC	WSJ	Bad teaching is tearing America apart
9/18/2020	NYC	NYT	Trump Calls for 'Patriotic Education' for American Children
9/18/2020	WDC	Washington Post	Trump attacks public schools

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