Black History Month in Suburban Schools:

An Examination of K-12 Pedagogies

by

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Dedication

To the students who marched,

may we one day rise to meet your expectations.

Acknowledgments

This work was born of collaboration. My gratitude to the contributors is extensive, and it is essential that I acknowledge the broad shoulders of the people whose hearts, hands, and homes allowed this research to grow from a concept into reality.

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Abstract

This dissertation, *Black History Month in Suburban Schools; An Examination of K-12 Pedagogies*, focuses on one Wisconsin school district's Black History Month (BHM) instruction over the course of three years of ethnographic research. It explores the manner in which teachers engage with Black History Month pedagogies, their relative levels of preparedness and the barriers and liberatory possibilities they experience in practice.

After a districtwide K-12 Black History Month survey provides a baseline for analysis, variations in teachers' BHM instructional practice are assessed alongside a "liberatory Black History Month framework." This framework utilizes components of "effective Black History instruction" (King & Brown, 2014), descriptors of "practiced communicators of Black History" (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017), and components of culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The resulting content, consciousness, and cultural objectives help to identify the salient practices Rolling Oaks' teachers use to subvert Eurocentric BHM curricula and the systemic and localized barriers they experience in BHM practice.

Findings suggest that while a majority of K-12 teachers provide Black History Month instruction, few feel adequately prepared for their practice. Teachers who are confident practitioners of Black History provided inclusive, student-focused, teacher-researched Black History instruction as a method of liberatory praxis, overcoming barriers while teaching during BHM. These teachers' stories provide a foundation for future research and suggest the need for advancing liberatory BHM instruction.

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"A major challenge in this age revolves around how K-12 educators decide to handle Black History Month and approach the study of African American life during the entire school year."

Pero Dagbovie, "Reclaiming the Black Past," 2018

Welcome to Rolling Oaks . . .

Calling for attention, the teacher gestures to an illustration of a famous figure displayed on the board. *"Does anyone know who this is?" she asks.* The first graders wiggle in their seats, hands waving, as every student tries desperately to catch her attention.

Unable to hold back his excitement, a student blurts out, *"It's Rosa Parks!"* The remaining hands fall, and students groan, muttering, *"I knew that!"* The teacher nods, *"Yes, it's Rosa Parks. Rosa Parks is famous for her work in the civil rights movement. This month, we will learn about many famous Black heroes, because it is Black History Month."*

The teacher launches into the read-aloud ″Riding with Rosa" (Forrest, 2016), a fictional account of Rosa Parks and the 1955 bus boycott. She turns a few pages, then pauses to face the class. An image of a Black family memorialized on a bus remains on the whiteboard behind her. She turns to the class and wonders aloud, *"Why don't we have white history month?"*
Her students wiggle in their spots, waiting for her to go on, and the moment passes as her question hangs in the air, unanswered (Pitts, Bracketing Journal, February 2016).

The first-grade teacher asking six-year-olds why there was not a white history month was a white, middle-aged, veteran teacher who considered herself a “master educator.” She was a colleague who invited me into her classroom for a writing lesson, whereupon I caught the end of her Black History Month introduction. At that moment, frozen with the students on the carpet, it occurred to me that if this colleague could ask, not a rhetorical question for critical conversation, but a question born of dysconscious (subconscious and unintentional) ignorance and confidence all wrapped up in one, what were the rest of the teachers doing during BHM?

I had seen the yearly Martin Luther King Jr. posters being raised and heard students reciting portions of the “I Have a Dream” speech. But I didn’t know what BHM instruction

looked like in classrooms across the school or district. This realization gave me pause and caused me to wonder: what might we learn from the teachers of the Rolling Oaks schools' instruction during Black History Month? The purpose of this study was to address this question, and to learn from the practices and barriers experienced by teachers in the community of Rolling Oaks Wisconsin.

To find an answer, I drew upon teachers' survey responses and narratives of their BHM instruction to identify promising practices taking place in Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin, a predominantly white suburban school district that mirrors national demographics. These promising practices included teachers' liberatory instruction (as identified in Chapter 3) and methods of subverting conventional Eurocentric (European or Anglo-American value or experience-focused) ideals and retellings that are routinely surfaced during BHM (King, 2018, King & Brown, 2014).

Beyond salient practices, the study explores the barriers Rolling Oaks teachers experience during their BHM instruction. The findings are drawn from three years of ethnographic research in Rolling Oaks Wisconsin. These findings can assist scholars, teachers, schools, and districts who are developing their Black History Month instruction by providing suggestions for practice and implementation, as well as avenues for future research.

Mapping the work : An Overview of the Study

Following this introduction, Chapter 1: *Black History Month in American Schools* provides a rationale for the study and introduces the reader to the research questions. It further provides an overview of the history of Black History Month, its beginnings as Negro History Week, and outlines the compelling need to continue using Dr. Carter G. Woodson's (2018/1933) methods of liberatory education in the present.

Chapter 2: *A Review of the Literature* presents an overview of the peer-reviewed research on PreK-12th grade Black History Month instruction in American schools. The review focuses on articles featuring Black History Month instruction since its national recognition in 1976 (Ford, 1976), and gives an outline of recent national Black History studies.

Chapter 3: *Methods and Procedures* presents the research study's design and introduces a nine-point liberatory Black History Month framework used in the analysis. It provides an introduction to the community at the heart of the research, a look at the researcher's positionality, and addresses the potential limitations of the study.

Chapter 4: *Districtwide Black History Instructional Practices* provides findings from Rolling Oaks' K-12 Black History Month (BHM) survey. It identifies the percentage of Rolling Oaks' teachers who teach Black History during BHM, provides an overview of their instruction (including the people, places, and movements they cover), and reveals their self-assessed levels of preparedness in teaching Black History. This chapter closes with a summary of the barriers and salient practices that Rolling Oaks' survey participants utilize during their BHM instruction.

Chapter 5: *Stories of Teachers' Black History Instruction* offers a window into individual teachers' BHM instruction. Twelve interview participants' instructional narratives are presented and analyzed alongside a nine-point liberatory BHM framework (first introduced in Chapter 3). Each participant's instruction is then assessed as "not yet," "approaching," or "meeting" liberatory BHM practice based on measures of content, consciousness, and cultural competencies.

Chapter 6: *Variations in Black History Month Instruction* reviews the variations in teachers' BHM instruction. Its' findings are presented in response to the stories of teachers' instructional practices (Chapter 5) and results from the districtwide survey (Chapter 4). The

analysis provides an answer to research question one and forms a continuum that can be used to address practitioners' BHM instruction across all schools and districts.

Chapter 7: *Barriers Towards Black History Instruction & Practices for Liberation* explores the barriers that have impacted participants' Black History Month instruction, along with the potentially liberatory practices they have used to address these challenges. Salient practices found to counter Eurocentrically dominated BHM instruction along with barriers across content, consciousness, and cultural objectives are presented in response to research questions two and three.

Finally, readers will find Chapter 8: *Formidable Challenges and Liberatory Possibilities* to contain concluding remarks and a discussion of the results. The implications of these findings and the potential for future engagement address the formidable challenges of BHM instruction in K-12 schools.

Chapter 1: Black History Month in American Schools

In schools claimed as places of promise, problematic epistemologies and colonizing curriculum dominate teachers' yearly renditions of Black History Month instruction (Woodson, 2018/1933; King, 2018; Dagbovie, 2018). While America's 80-89% white teachers (NCES, 2017) celebrate Martin Luther King. Jr., Rosa Parks, and Harriett Tubman across grades K-12, their simplistic renditions of Black heroes and saviors inadvertently reinforce notions of Black exceptionalism (King & Woodson, 2017). The resulting representations of Black History cause many students to embrace the idea that only a few "good blacks"[1] are worthy of recognition each year.

Now more than ninety years after Dr. Carter G. Woodson began Negro History Week (1926) as a radical critique of the "traditional" Eurocentric histories taught in schools, the majority of America's K-12 teachers' still present Black History Month lessons devoid of context, critique, or analysis (King & Woodson, 2017). Despite scholarship that profiles the potential for teachers "emancipatory" Black History teaching practices (Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008) and "effective Black History" instruction (King & Brown, 2014), practitioners are widely found to be engaging in practices that traumatize their students (King & Woodson, 2107).

Over the last two years alone, Black History Month observances have found teachers physically enacting Black persecution through mock slave auctions (Griffith, 2019), "escape from slave master" physical education games (Collazo, 2019), and walking upon their students' backs to mirror the pain of slavery (NBC, 2018). Further, less *physically* traumatic examples have showcased the psychological impact of ill-advised Black History observances. Not long

[1] (Mrs. Lee, interview notes, 2019)

ago, a New York principal sued her colleagues for reverse racism after they complained when she banned Black History classes (Armus, 2019) during Black History Month 2018. These troubling examples are just a few that have made the news. The remainder of teachers' BHM instruction has yet to be critically evaluated (Dagbovie, 2018), as limited examples of K-12 teachers' BHM instructional practice exist in the peer reviewed literature.

In the meantime, it is important to note that there are practitioners showcasing culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995) as a method of highlighting students' cultural knowledge, inspiring critical discussions of Black Historical consciousness, and improving BHM instruction through professional development and reflection (Landa 2012; Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008). Yet, even in teacher education programs, scholars find that in response to their future BHM instruction, American teachers' "uncritical and limited ways of thinking must be identified, understood, and brought to their conscious awareness," (King, 1991) or they will continue to unwittingly justify the terrors done (Zinn, 2003) through alternately sterile or traumatic representations of Black heroes and saviors (King & Woodson, 2017).

Examples in the literature highlight Black History Month instruction as primarily occurring in narratives of Black persecution, with materials that privilege slavery, segregation, and civil rights (King, 2018, Rolling Oaks student protest, 2019). This repeated focus on Black subjugation inculcates inaccurate portrayals of Black History Month as focused only on negative Black experiences (Griffith, 2019; Collazo, 2019; NBC, 2018) and thereby disconnects it from students' experiences of Black joy in the present. These violent representations damage students' perceptions of Black society causing "educative-psychic violence" (King & Woodson, 2017) that is exacerbated through problematic materials and instruction that actively reinforces white, community-specific norms (Salter & Adams, 2016).

While awash in the complexities of such BHM instruction, America's majority white teachers (NCES, 2017) are encountering a "browning America" (J. King, 1991). In 2017, twenty-six million students of color represented 53% of the 50 million students nationally enrolled in grades K-12. Eight million, or 16% of these students were Black or African American (NCES, 2017). At the same time, teacher demographics remained predominantly white and middle-class. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2017), white teachers head more than 80% of American classrooms (NCES, 2017).

Despite the steady growth of students of color in American schools, Evans-Winters (2017) and Delpit (2006) assert that the majority of America's white teachers join the profession with limited experience interacting with Black students and communities. While Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, & Brewer (1995) determined that a match between teacher and student race and ethnicity held little impact over how much a student learns, they found it has a *significant* impact on teachers' "subjective evaluations of their students" (Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, & Brewer, 1995, p. 547).

These subjective evaluations, compounded by the white, middle-class background of the majority of America's teachers, insulate educators of all racial and ethnic backgrounds from their Black Historical miseducation. The limited critical-historical knowledge presented in American schools, alongside majority white teachers' lack of interactions with people of color, allows many well-meaning educators to negate, obscure, and deny the complexities of our nation's history while claiming altruistic intent. These educators' seemingly well-meaning BHM lessons result in the presentation of "feel good" histories devoid of critical discussion and context (King, 2018). Joyce King's (1991) review of pre-service teachers' Black History knowledge, confirmed similar findings, asserting that America's predominantly white teachers' [Black History]

instruction could become a method to intervene against dysconscious racism (subconscious and unintentional racism) and broaden teachers' knowledge of societal inequities in the present (King, 1991).

Acknowledging American teachers' altruistic intent and simultaneously limited racial, cultural and Black Historical knowledge, BHM may be considered a rare opportunity for America's predominantly white teachers to discuss race in what they may consider a "safe" and publicly accepted manner.

This study, *Black History Month in Suburban Schools: An Examination of K-12 Pedagogies,* explores how teachers in Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin, engage in Black History Month instruction. Examples of BHM instruction are narrated by twelve teachers, whose stories are compared alongside districtwide (K-12) Black History Month survey data. These multiple means of analysis present critical examples of *in-practice* teacher instruction during BHM.[2] The findings include a review of Rolling Oaks' teachers' BHM instructional practices and a discussion of the implicit and explicit opportunities and challenges that impact their praxis.[3]

The Research Questions

The following three questions guide this research study:

- How do teachers provide Black History instruction in and around Black History Month?
- Which barriers impede teachers' liberatory Black History Month instructional practices?
- Which practices were found to counter Eurocentric narratives of Black History?

To address these questions, a clarification of terms may be necessary. For the purposes of this dissertation, Black History Month (BHM) instructional practices may include any Black

[2] Literature surrounding America's predominantly white teachers' BHM instruction has focused on pre-service teacher practitioners and their eventual impact on students rather than on in-service teachers who are actively impacting students' experiences. (King, 2016; King, 1991).
[3] All community and individuals' names have been replaced by pseudonyms

History instruction teachers identified as salient, as noted by "in and around BHM," in research question one. This question is open ended, noting the generalized "lack" of Black History instruction engaged across the year, as evidenced in the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC, 2016) study into teachers' practices.

In clarification of research question two, a "barrier" is understood to be an obstacle that teachers and their students encounter that limits their efforts to provide Black History Month instruction, either personally or professionally. In question three, "practices" refer to instructional methods and behaviors that teachers use to subvert the predominantly Eurocentric BHM instruction found in the majority of American schools (Dagbovie, 2018; King 2018). Finally, "Eurocentric narratives" will be understood as stories that privilege European or Anglo-dominant ideologies.

The findings of this study will advance the literature on the BHM instructional practices of American teachers. Further assisting in generalizability, the demographics of the Rolling Oaks are salient, as ninety-four percent of Rolling Oaks school district faculty, and 92% of (11/12) research participants were white (Rolling Oaks' Human Resources [ROHR], 2019). These demographics closely follow the 80-89% white teachers found in American schools (NCES, 2017).

From The Beginnings of the Movement to Modern Observance: The History of BHM

In his seminal text, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (2018/1933), Dr. Carter G. Woodson explored the possibility of white teachers providing a humanizing curriculum that would include Black History, and found that "in most cases tradition, race, hate, segregation, and terrorism make such a thing impossible" (Woodson 2018/1933, p.5). Woodson contended that students' continued miseducation (in terms of decontextualized, simplistic histories told from a

Eurocentric perspective), contributed to the violence against Black and brown bodies, for "there would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom" (Woodson 2018/1933, p.5). To counteract these violent misrepresentations of history in schools, Woodson determined "the only thing to do in this case then, is to deal with the situation as it is" (Woodson, 2018/1933 p. 22).

To Woodson, (and to his contemporary Afropessimist colleagues), the situation "as it is" finds schools to be spaces of dehumanization, actively enslaving students' minds and reinforcing prejudicial (predominantly Eurocentric) examples of American history in the present (Woodson 2018/1933; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Sharpe, 2016; Hartman & Wilderson, 2003).[4]

To upend such injustices, Dr. Woodson developed Negro History Week in 1926 (recognized as Black History Month in 1976) as a radical critique of white-dominant educational policies and practices negatively impacting Black students' experience in schools (Woodson, 2018/1933; Grant, Brown & Brown, 2016; Cuban, 1972). Developed alongside scholars in the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now known as The Association for the Study of African-American Life and History or ASALH) (ASALH, 2019), Negro History Week was created as a "vision and invention to give humanity something new" (Woodson, 2018/1933). As intended, Woodson's Negro History Week would empower Black students and simultaneously educate their white teachers in the histories of our nation, dismantling long-held racial prejudices (Dagbovie, 2005). Woodson and his contemporaries believed such education would further students', teachers', and scholars' journey towards psychological liberation (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2015).

[4] I provide these examples not to be fatalistic, but to outline the necessity of continuing to study teachers' Black History instruction in the present.

To further these liberatory practices (teaching and learning experiences free from bias, oppression, and constraint), Woodson encouraged the participation of teachers, parents, and museum historians in the observance of Negro History Week (even inviting them into his home for study) (Dagbovie, 2015). He leveraged these participants' interests alongside the curiosity of the general population,[5] using Black History education as a form of liberatory praxis, helping to fuel the expansion of a Black Historical movement (Dagbovie, 2010; Woodson, 2018/1933).

Though Dr. Woodson died in 1950, Negro History Week continued to flourish. On its 50th observance, in 1976, the humble week had grown into a month-long celebration. Fueled by its positive observance in schools across the nation, Negro History Week was formally recognized as "Black History Month" in 1976. When President Gerald Ford issued the first Black History Month proclamation, he noted the "Impressive contributions of black Americans to our national life and culture." He also urged, "fellow citizens to join me in tribute to Black History Month and the message of courage and perseverance it brings to all of us" (Ford, 1976).

Following President Ford's 1976 proclamation, all American Presidents have recognized the observance of Black History Month in some manner.[6] Whether known as "Afro-American

[5] Coinciding with the growth of the Harlem Renaissance, a Black arts movement that highlighted authors such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and the work of historians like W.E.B. Du Bois and his *Crisis Magazine* (Du Bois, 1910-1924, ed.) (Crisis, 2019), Black History, and contemporary Black achievements were finding their way into everyday citizens' homes. Dating from the early 1910s through the 1930s, the Harlem Renaissance was an upsurge in Black arts and culture that took the global stage by storm.

[6] When President Donald Trump took office in 2017, he broke from his predecessors' examples, failing to issue a standard BHM proclamation. Instead, Trump spoke to the press at an "African American listening session" he hosted at the White House. There, Trump recognized Black Americans' "unimaginable sacrifice, hard work and faith in America." He further recognized four people, including Martin Luther King Jr. and more curiously, Frederick Douglass. Trump said, "Frederick Douglass is an example of somebody who's done an amazing job and is being recognized more and more, I notice — Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks, and millions more black Americans who made America what it is today. Big impact" (Washington, 2017). In 2020, in the midst of his House Impeachment trial, he posted his proclamation to the White House website (Trump, 2020).

History Month," "African-American History Month," or "National African American History Month,"[7] its purpose has remained the same. To center the Black experience.

By 1982, Black History Month was in its sixth year of observance, and five states had adopted mandates for instruction in "Afro-American History" (Harris, 1982, p 108). By contrast, in 2018, only seven states required (through similar laws) Black History instruction in schools (King, 2018; SPLC, 2018). Although disjointed Black History mandates still exist in these states, no comprehensive system for the delivery and instruction of Black History has been provided nationwide. Citing a National Museum of African American History and Culture [NMAAHC] (2016) study, "major topics relating to African American History are listed in local standards only about 20% of the time" (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017, p. 390). This lack of standards, mandates, and local, state, and national oversight provides little *active* support for teachers' implementation of Black History instruction. For "unlike math and reading, states are not required to meet academic content standards for teaching social studies and United States history" (Stewart, 2019).

A Dream Not Yet Realized

From the foundations of Negro History Week in 1926, Woodson hoped that as dialogue about race became more acceptable both in America and abroad, the study of Black History would garner its rightful place in the "traditional" American history curriculum, rendering Negro History Week unnecessary (Dagbovie, 2004, 2007; King & Brown, 2014, Woodson, 2018/1933).

Now, more than 90 years later, Black History Month's yearly observance suggests that *Woodson's vision has yet to be recognized.* Current iterations of BHM are provided without

[7] First observed by President Bill Clinton in 1994, and has been so recognized by every president since (Library of Congress, 2019).

oversight and primarily left to practitioners' discretion. The examples at the start of this chapter and in the introduction to this study provide further evidence that American teachers' BHM instruction requires further attention.

This study serves as a call to action, entreating scholars, practitioners, and the general public to engage in the discussion and study of the complex histories of our nation. Together, we teachers, scholars, students, and community members (as in Woodson's origins) must critique, celebrate, and *learn* from our past in the present (King, 2018).

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

This chapter focuses on the peer-reviewed literature addressing K-12 teachers' BHM instructional practices published since the national recognition of Black History Month in 1976 (Ford, 1976). Finding only four articles that matched the search criteria, including the work of King & Brown (2014), Swindler-Boutte & Strickland (2008), Landa (2012), and Merelman (1993),[8] this chapter will profile each of the articles in brief. Additional studies covering BHM, or BHM curriculum, were excluded from the review, with the exception of the single high school study found to address BHM. The review closes with an overview of national studies on K-12 Black History education and makes a case for the necessity of continued studies of K-12 teachers' BHM pedagogies.

Literature Review Methods

Articles for this literature review are from academic research databases, including EBSCO/ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and JSTOR. Initial searches broadly included the terms "Negro History Week," "Black History Month," "Afro-American History Month," "African American History Month," and K-12 schools. Finding articles matching these search criteria primarily focused on Black History instructional materials and texts (King & Woodson, 2017; King, 2017; King, 2016; King, 2014; Brown & Au, 2014; King & Brown, 2012; Brown & Brown, 2010), I focused subsequent searches on K-12 teachers' BHM instructional practices,

[8] A note about additional BHM Materials: Finding a paucity of articles that met search criteria, I connected with colleagues at the *Carter Center for K-12 Black History Education,* a Black History consortium led by Dr. LaGarrett King. I asked about any articles I may have missed profiling white teachers, Black History, and K-12 school districts. Two additional articles were brought to my attention, though both detailed educators outside the United States. Doharty (2018) explored painful pedagogies during Black History Month in UK schools, and McFarlane (2015) assessed white teachers' culturally responsive Black History practices in Canada. Through collaboration with Carter Center colleagues, my review of the limited BHM literature became part of a chapter entitled: White teachers, Mis-education, and the Psycho-Social Lynching of Black History (Pitts, 2019) published in *Perspectives in Black History* (King (Ed.) 2019). For a more comprehensive discussion of this literature, and its relation to the ongoing oppression of Black History in the present, see that publication.

further reducing the sample size. Reading for a sample matching the demographics of the Rolling Oaks community, I found only four articles that featured white teachers, grades pre-K-12, and Black History Month instruction (King & Brown 2014, Landa, 2012; Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Merelman, 1993). These articles became the foundation for this review and are profiled in short below. For a quick reference, see Table 2.a. *"K-12 Black History Month Instruction, A Guide to the Literature."*

Table 2.a. K-12 Black History Month Instruction, A Guide to the Literature

Citation	Research Location & Demographics	Instructional Methods/ Theoretical Frameworks Utilized	Findings
Swindler-Boutte, G., & Strickland, J. (2008). **Making African American Culture and History Central to Early Childhood Teaching and Learning.** *The Journal of Negro Education, 77*(2), 131-142.	South Carolina pre-school with a majority of African American students. The article focuses on pre-K and kindergarten students.	Strickland (PK-K teacher) uses liberatory education and emancipatory teaching practices. These practices draw on literature, storytelling, and images of Black History to engage students in building a context of the African Diaspora. The teacher promotes CRP and continued professional development as methods for improving practice. Strickland is a white teacher.	Authors suggest utilizing students' background knowledge, classroom contexts, and early childhood teaching strategies to support early BHM knowledge. Storytelling, and use of primary source materials supports their work.
Landa, M. H. (2012). **Deconstructing Black History Month: Three African American Boys' Exploration of Identity.** *Multicultural Perspectives.* 14(1), 11–17.	5% African American students in a predominantly white upper-class neighborhood school in Maryland. Focus on 2nd graders.	Landa uses critical literacy as a method for students to engage with texts. This technique allows for self-reflection and journaling as students create histories that support their emerging Black identities. Class discussions help to include all students in sharing their experiences. Two white teachers' are mentioned.	Landa's students journal to reveal their experiences. Their writings include making meaning from the histories presented in diverse children's books.
King, L. J. & Brown, K. (2014). **Once a Year to be Black: Fighting Against Typical Black History Month pedagogies.** *The Negro Educational Review,* 65(1-4), 23-43.	Suburban and rural schools near a mid-sized city in the southwest. The authors focus on three middle school teachers, two identify as Black and one white.	The authors use a "Woodsonian" framework as a method of both critique and analysis, examining what Woodson deemed to be "effective" Black History teaching practices. This three point BHM framework includes (1) critical analysis of history by students, (2) scientific research by teachers, and (3) the teaching/learning outcomes that are	The three teachers are found to provide instruction that is culturally relevant and meaningful to students, but does not negate the problematic practices that many teachers (Black and white) have internalized through their own miseducation. The scholars point to a Woodsonian framework for

		relevant to students' lives, and "make life better" (p.36).	BHM teaching as a method that both in-service and preservice teachers can employ to improve practice.
Merelman R. (1993). **Black History and Cultural Empowerment: A Case Study.** *American Journal of Education. 101(4), 331-358.*	Maryland middle class Suburbs, 65% of students are Black. Author focuses on both elementary and middle school classrooms, and highlights the work of both Black and white teachers.	This article provides a case study of elementary and middle schools in one district who are implementing an integrated multicultural curriculum.	Merelman found that many of the teachers in the study devoted too much time to administrative and social order tasks- lessening the rigorous academics, and holding low expectations of the class. Teachers' cultural identities appeared to impact their presentation of material.

Black History Month in Pre-Kindergarten through Eighth Grade

All four examples of the literature profiling pre-k-8th-grade BHM instruction highlight reflective practitioners seeking ways to improve and extend their Black History instruction while subverting Black Historical miseducation (Woodson, 2018, 1933, King & Brown, 2014). These articles provide hope for practitioners of BHM everywhere. While they observe teachers' BHM pedagogies, they focus not only on the missteps teachers make during BHM, but also the humanizing and emancipatory measures these practitioners use to move beyond Eurocentric models of Black History. These humanizing and emancipatory measures acknowledge students' intersectional identities, value their lived histories, and encourage teachers' and students' critical evaluation of the historical narrative. Such means of instruction seeks to free BHM from anglicized retellings of Black History and the narrative subjugation that has been found to be routinely centered in K-12 classrooms.

King and Brown's (2014) study *"Once a Year to be Black: Fighting Against Typical Black History Month Pedagogies,"* assessed the practices of three middle school teachers who were interrupting a historically marginalizing Black History Month curricula. After identifying teachers who were seeking to subvert "traditional" models of BHM instruction through

community recommendations, King & Brown (2014) examined the BHM planning and practices three 6-8th grade teachers, two Black and one white. Later, the authors applied a "Woodsonian" lens of both critique and analysis, examining teachers' practices for what they deemed "effective" Black History Month instruction. Effective BHM instruction required three components, including; (1) critical analysis of history by students, (2) the scientific research of Black History topics by teachers, and (3) teaching and learning outcomes that were relevant to students' lives (p.36). Readers will find these "effective practices" utilized as the first three components of the liberatory BHM instructional framework, identified as an analytical tool in Chapter 3.

After evaluating each of the teachers' BHM practices, King & Brown (2014) found that the teachers exhibited both "transgressive and regressive" BHM practices. While these some were actively working to subvert Eurocentrically informed BHM instruction, (for example one teacher connected Black History to students lives in the present through gospel music) other practitioners instruction included only well-worn narratives or activities that resulted in a "foods and festivals" approach (Grant & Sleeter, 1996) to Black History. King & Brown's (2014) research concluded that Black History Month pedagogies "require more attention, and a concerted, collective approach to the continued education of communities both in and out of schools" (King & Brown, 2014, p 37).

In 2012, Melissa Hare Landa's article *Deconstructing Black History Month: Three African American Boys' Exploration of Identity* followed scholar-practitioner Landa's experiences as a first and second-grade teacher conducting participatory action research during Black History Month. Analyzing three African American Boys' experiences journaling about their identities while engaging with multicultural literature, Landa's model of BHM instruction

provides an accessible starting point for early elementary educators seeking to transform their BHM instruction. In a discussion of her practices, Landa encouraged educators to limit the "tourist approach" (Sleeter & Grant, 1996) to BHM, and instead, to draw on their Black students' funds of knowledge and interests, engaging children in explorations of identity within the cultural histories we teach. Landa further encourages teachers to ask their students about their identities and experiences, noting "white teachers cannot understand the experience of being a Black child in a white school - until they ask." (Landa, 2012, p.11) Landa's findings provide an example of a teacher utilizing critical literacy and student-reflection as techniques to improve students' experiences and engagement during BHM.

Making African American Culture and History Central to Early Childhood Teaching and Learning is a 2008 article by researcher and participant duo Swindler-Boutte & Strickland. Their analysis features the instruction of white pre-k and kindergarten teacher Strickland and her attempts towards utilizing culturally relevant practices (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995) as an element of liberatory and "emancipatory" Black History instruction.[9]

Teaching students from a primarily Black neighborhood, Strickland is recognized by peers and administrators as an effective instructor for students of all backgrounds. Outside her classroom, Strickland seeks professional development in culturally relevant practices, and draws on these experiences to privilege her students' interests. She provides lessons that feature African Kings and Queens, critical discussion around multicultural picture books, and analysis of artifacts such as magazines for Black representation. Strickland then uses these materials as analytical tools, engaging her students in conversations about marginalized communities (Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008).

[9] The authors identify emancipatory instruction as inclusive of student-centered, globally-informed perspectives that acknowledge the multiple modalities of even the youngest learners (Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008, p.133).

Strickland's instruction in Black Historical topics far extended beyond BHM, including multiple aspects of her students' identities and interests, and utilizing tools from professional learning as an impetus for reflection. When critical pushback from families became a concern during Strickland's Black History instruction, she wrote a letter reinforcing the importance of including Black History instruction throughout the year, stating her intention to continue the work, and virtually shut down further complaints.

In closing, the authors cautioned that Strickland's confident "emancipatory" teaching is not a commonly observed instructional practice, as many schools and districts shy away from engaging with the non-prescriptive nature of CRP and Black History instruction (p.132). The authors further suggested that teachers often fail to engage with Black History in prek- and kindergarten classrooms as they underestimate children's cognitive abilities, fearing children are incapable of understanding issues beyond their immediate lives (p. 134). Strickland's instructional innovations and connections to students' families and interests show that even at the youngest grades, liberatory BHM instruction is possible (Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008).

Merelman's (1993) study *Black History and Cultural Empowerment: A Case Study* featured Black and white elementary and middle school teachers in Regency County Maryland as they experienced districtwide implementation of a multicultural curriculum. Observing both Black and white 5th and 6th grade teachers during Black History Month, Merelman wanted to find out if Black History when taught as a component of multicultural curriculum could serve as a method of Black empowerment (p.334).

First accounting for his elementary observations in grade five, Merelman found that teachers' BHM instruction varied in terms of cultural competence and critical evaluation of texts from the students' perspective. In one example, Merelman observed both a Black and a white

5th-grade teacher using African folktales as instructional tools during BHM. While the Black teacher explored elements of cultural memory, she paused often, asking her students to draw connections to the people in the story, making it relevant to their lives in the present. After reading, she invited students to create story quilts (based on the folktale) in a multidisciplinary math lesson that followed. In a white 5th grade teachers' elementary classroom nearby, Merelman observed a similar folktale being used as a more "universal" narrative. This text featured animal characters, and a presentation in which the white teacher positioned her own experience within the story, negating the cultural relevance of the tale. Merelman found that in these examples, students' experiences of African folktales were heavily impacted by teachers' cultural identities, as these Black and white teachers drew students into the texts using their own experiences as a window for analysis (Merelman, 1993).

In further observations of middle school teachers' BHM instruction, Merelman found white middle school teachers' emphasis on administrative tasks during lessons during BHM were geared to control the social order rather than utilized as a method of Black historical empowerment. While the majority white middle-school teachers focused on managing behavior and setting parameters, they failed to engage students in critical reflection or discussion around topics in Black History. Merelman's observational experience suggested BHM was primarily seen as an additive experience, and most often layered on top of the dominant Eurocentric curriculum already provided in Maryland schools (Merelman, 1993).

Assessing the Collective

One of the most striking findings in this review highlights the ways in which elementary and pre-kindergarten teachers made Black History topics accessible to their youngest learners. As Swindler-Boutte & Strickland (2008) suggest, "teachers must find ways to sustain and

introduce African American history and culture, even to the youngest student" (Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008, p.138).

Overall, the studies reviewed showcase how humanizing BHM instructional practices *are possible* in pk-8th grade settings, though far from universal in implementation. One avenue for future studies suggests the need to review average teachers' BHM instruction. The teachers in these studies were sought out by researchers, and (except for in Merelman's study) were recognized for their efforts to engage in critical Black History education (King & Brown, 2014; Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Landa, 2002).

Black History in American High Schools

In the only study of American high schools and BHM found by this researcher, Salter & Adams' (2016) exploration of Black and white segregated high schools' BHM representations suggest that white America has entirely appropriated Black History.[10] The researchers posit that BHM observances are co-opted through American's predominantly white gaze, and find further evidence in the neoliberal marketing campaigns impacting the national portrayal of BHM (Salter & Adams, 2016, see also Ram, 2018; King & Brown, 2012). Assessed through corporately produced BHM posters and advertisements that celebrated diversity as the ideal, Salter & Adams found that demographically white-dominant schools showcased narratives of uplift, inclusion, and celebrated only the "traditional" heroes and saviors (such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Harriet Tubman) King & Woodson warn of (2017). By contrast, cultural representations of BHM found in predominantly Black high schools included notions of racism,

[10] The only example of high school BHM observances found did not explicitly identify teachers' instructional practices, but was included in this review under the implicit understanding that America's more than 80% white teachers (NCES, 2017) were a part of the creation of BHM materials assessed.

and a few examples even showcased group and individual resistance to such oppressive forces (Salter & Adams, 2016).[11]

Drawing on high school teachers' and students' physical representations of BHM (through posters and displays), Salter and Adams posit that the constitution of students' psyche and awareness of BHM is directed by how they interact with the imagery (and experience) of BHM. These cultural representations provide purposeful narratives that minimize or deny white responsibility or reconstruct Black History in order to serve a monocultural white ideal (Salter & Adams, 2016, p.3), thereby reinforcing "normative" Eurocentric narratives of BHM. The authors went on to argue that teachers and students in both Black and white settings allowed representations of BHM to become cultural tools that further impacted their independent and community-specific identities (Salter & Adams, 2016, p.2; see also Roth, 1970; Epstein, 1998). Salter & Adams' research suggests that artifacts of BHM (such as those found throughout K-12 schools) have a significant impact on students' experiences of BHM. They close by asserting that future BHM research will be necessary.

A National Review of Black History Education in American Schools

Beyond pre-K-12th grade instructional practices, national studies of Black History education have broadly explored the impact of both cultural and educational interventions on Americans' experience of BHM. In one example, Oberg and Flanagan's (2017) *Above and Beyond the Standards: How Practiced Communicators Teach African American History* drew on a National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC, 2016) study, *Research into the State of African American History in K-12 Public Schools* (NMAAHC, 2016) (conducted by Oberg Research firm, 2017). NMAAHC's study included survey data from 893

[11] These divergent outcomes from BHM representation in predominantly Black and white schools further piqued my curiosity about the impacts of predominantly white teachers' instructional practice.

teachers across all 50 states. Their research worked to determine teachers' collective efficacy in teaching African American History.[12] Both Oberg & Flanagan (2017) and NMAAHC's (2016) findings indicate that American teachers consider Black History Month relatively *unimportant* as a component of Black History when compared to measures of teachers' academic knowledge, school leadership, family support, student maturity, and teachers' cultural authority in the teaching of Black History (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017, p.391; NMAAHC, 2016).

Using these findings, Oberg & Flanagan identified traits embodied by "practiced communicators of African American History." The authors define a "practiced communicator" as a teacher who frequently integrates Black History knowledge into their curriculum, and is confident in their "academic authority" (or knowledge) of Black History topics. Oberg and Flanagan identify practiced communicators as teachers who use primary source materials, attend professional development on teaching Black History, form professional learning communities with other teachers, diversify their classroom teaching materials, and learn to find comfort when speaking about race & racism (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017, p. 392-393). These measures will later be referenced in terms of opportunities towards liberatory BHM instructional practice, finalized in Table 3.a. (Chapter 3).

Beyond Oberg & Flanagan (2017) and NMAAHC's (2016) studies, organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center (2018) and The New York Times (2019) have joined scholars, practitioners, and historians in researching Black History in education. In the most comprehensive study on K-12 teachers' Black History instructional practice to this date;[13] The

[12] Collective efficacy can be considered teachers' belief in students' abilities to learn, confidence in their instructional practices and content, understanding of what makes adequate growth, and the belief in the teachers' impact on the learning process.

[13] The SPLC's study engaged multiple levels of practitioners in research, drawing on the work of scholars, practitioners, historians, and journalists towards a comprehensive review of Black History in practice (SPLC, 2018).

Southern Poverty Law Center's (2018), *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* was introduced by teacher-practitioner publication, *Teaching Tolerance* (SPLC, 2018).

In the first K-12 Black History research of its kind, scholars, historians, and educators worked together to interview teachers and students about the pedagogies of American slavery. These multiple perspectives, previously "ignored in theories of history" (Trouillot, 1995), were assessed alongside state and U.S. history materials and curricula to create a framework for instruction.

Their findings resulted in two iterations. A middle and high school framework for teaching American Slavery, released in 2018, and subsequent elementary framework in 2019. Although comprehensive, these reports focused *only* on teaching American Slavery, a topic that already receives the lion's share of instructional attention, as one of the few Black History topics addressed universally in both state and national American History standards (SPLC, 2018).

SPLC's *Teaching Hard History*: *American Slavery*'s findings suggest that America's predominantly white teachers are both frustrated with their instructional materials, and together with these problematic materials, offer misinformed narratives of history. SPLC's report further explores teachers' discomfort and uncertainty in teaching difficult topics, which causes them to avoid teaching the "hard history" of American experience, beginning with enslavement (SPLC, 2018). SPLC's findings are relevant to, and generalizable towards BHM instruction in the United States, as evidenced by the results from this research further confirmed by interviewees in Chapter 7.

Limitations in Current Research

The paucity of research assessing America's pre-K-12th grade BHM teaching practices is striking. The seven studies I've profiled in this review, (King & Brown (2014), Swindler-Boutte

& Strickland (2008), Landa (2012), and Merelman (1993), Salter & Adams (2016), Oberg & Flanagan (2017), and NMAAHC (2016) represent the sum total of literature featuring implicit or explicit examples of pre k-12th grade and predominantly white teachers' instructional practices in and around Black History Month.

In hopes of finding further references, I scoured piles of articles specifically about African-American History, most notably, those on Black History courses and pre-service teachers (L.J.King, 2016; J. King 2017), Black History materials (Roth, 1970; K. Brown & A. Brown, 2010; Landorf & Lowenstein, 2004; King 2017), and international Black History instruction (Hunyh, 2013; Bery, 2014; Berk, 1972; Jamison, 1978; Flanagan & Hindley, 2017). These articles were instructive but *did NOT* mention Black History Month or white teachers, either implicitly or explicitly. I then reviewed SPLC's (2018) teaching Hard History, and determined its' findings suggest barriers towards Black History and BHM instructional practices that are salient for consideration, warranting its inclusion in this review.

King & Brown's (2014) research concluded that Black History Month pedagogies require more attention, and a concerted, collective approach to continued education of communities both in and out of schools (p.37). I must further recommend that America's predominantly white teachers' practices must be further assessed "as they are," rather than explicitly through the work of teachers who are already committed to critical Black History instruction (Pitts, 2019) as in the work of King & Brown, 2014; Landa, 2012; and Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008. The relative absence of literature on America's 80%+ white teachers' (NCES, 2017) Black History Month instructional practices, provides opportunities for further assessment and research.

Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures

This study, *Black History Month in Suburban Schools: An Examination of K-12 Pedagogies,* presents a portion of a multiyear research project exploring the complexities of BHM instruction and its impact on multiple stakeholders in the community of Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin. In total, three years of ethnographic data collection and analysis included a review of districtwide Black History Month surveys and BHM curricular materials (including physical artifacts and videos of school and community events), classroom observations, field notes, a teacher-participant bracketing journal, and more than 30 interviews with parents, students, principals, and teachers.

Chapter 3: *Methods and Procedures,* outlines the research focus of *this* dissertation study: providing an analysis of Rolling Oaks teachers' BHM instructional practices along with the barriers and possibilities for future instruction. After addressing the research design, methods of data collection, and procedures for analysis, the chapter introduces the community at the heart of the study, the researcher's positionality, and the potential limitations of this research.

The Research Design

This qualitative research study presents an exploration of Rolling Oaks' BHM practices. It features teachers in K-12 classrooms of a primarily white suburban school district seeking to understand the challenges of teaching during BHM while identifying liberatory possibilities for instruction.

The study began with a districtwide Black History Month survey, which provided "quasi-statistics" as a quantitative foundation from which to ground the study's qualitative analysis. The survey results were then compared to twelve K-12 teachers' stories of teaching and learning Black History in the community of Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin.

The narrative explorations of teachers' experiences teaching Black History in and around BHM illuminate the barriers and salient practices each of these teachers encountered. Conceived as an inquiry into the human experience, the review of these multiple measures of analysis allows for a "personal and storied life" (Connelly & Clandinin in Green, Camili & Elmore, 2006) to shine through. Findings from this study provide a window into Rolling Oaks teachers' BHM practices and include generalizable suggestions for any teacher, school, or district seeking to analyze their Black History instruction. These findings also provide recommendations for future BHM scholarship and explore the liberatory possibilities of these practitioners' techniques.

Methods of Data Collection

Data collection for this dissertation study was limited to two components. First, a BHM survey was issued to all the teachers districtwide, gathering preliminary data and offering teachers the chance to opt into the interview portion of the study. The second data source included 12 semi-structured teacher interviews that encompassed BHM instruction across the Rolling Oaks' K-12 schools.

Elements of Analysis

The Black History Month Survey

A 5-question BHM survey was provided for educators to complete online or in-person (Appendix A). A flyer for this survey was posted in each of Rolling Oaks' school offices and staff lounges.[14] By scanning a QR code on the flyer, educators were directed to a digital questionnaire that was used as a confidential means of recruitment. After accessing the survey, participants were asked about their BHM teaching practices. The questions inquired whether they taught Black History during BHM, what subjects/topics they covered (including people,

[14] As approved by building and district administration.

movements, and events), and how prepared they felt in teaching Black History during Black History Month. In the final survey question, teachers could provide suggestions for future Black History teaching practices and opt into the pool of semi-structured interview candidates by leaving their name and email. Digital responses were collected beginning in the summer of 2017. Additional copies of the survey were shared across the district by Rolling Oaks' Director of Technology in the springs of 2018 and 2019, respectively. Survey data collection closed in June 2019, with a total of 217 respondents participating. The teachers included in the data collection represented approximately 29% of the total district educators.

Before survey data analysis, electronic sorting and removal of duplicate responses were necessary. As I reviewed the final responses, I began memoing in the margins, drawing themes from the districtwide BHM survey responses. Meanwhile, repeated memoing informed the development of emerging codes, theoretical frameworks, and assisted in the review of teacher interviews for further analysis. Ultimately these memos led to comparisons of trends across the elementary, middle, and high school teachers' responses both within grade-level teams and the district as a whole.

Teacher Interviews

The second component for examination in this qualitative study was the narrative analysis of teacher interviews. Interviews were scheduled across the years 2017-2019 for willing teacher-participants who had "opted in" on question six of the survey (Appendix A). While 29 participants submitted their names and emails for consideration, 15 respondents ultimately sat down for interviews throughout two and a half years (amongst the others, some respondents retired, left the district, or just failed to respond). The participants who engaged in interviews did so of their own volition, with no compensation provided save an occasional cup of coffee.

Of the 15 teacher-participants, 12 teachers engaged in one-on-one interviews. These interviews took place in a location of the participant's choosing, usually a classroom or a coffee shop. Three white female teacher-participants with more than 60 years of combined service were interviewed together in a busy coffee shop (at their request), which resulted in the removal of their interview(s) from the study's sample for lack of intelligibility (it was impossible to tell who was speaking).

After data collection, all interviews were professionally transcribed and read multiple times. While reading, I used open coding for "themes that a[rose] from the story" (Huber & Whelan, 1999, in Creswell, 2013). In addition to the open codes found in these narrative accounts and category codes from the liberatory BHM instructional framework (see Table 3.a.), teacher interviews and survey results became "written transcripts" (Castle, 2012, p.112) for further category identification. Reading these materials multiple times, I added notes in the margins, memoing (Creswell, 2013, p.89), and journaling to capture impressions and to refine questions for the participants in follow-up conversations.

In the final stages of analysis, teachers' stories of BHM instruction were compared to the districtwide BHM survey results. The analysis of these multiple measures was both "flexible and evolving" (Creswell, 2013 p. 239), as codes and themes emerged from both data sets. From the resulting codes and themes, I identified salient BHM instructional practices as well as the barriers teachers experienced during instruction.

The resulting academic study hopes to engage educators as they read Rolling Oaks teachers' stories of BHM instruction. As one reads, I would encourage teachers and academics alike to pause and reflect on their practices during BHM. This study provides both communities

with a "wake-up call that hopefully will provoke a cultural awareness if not change" (Harter, 2011) in terms of future K-12 BHM instruction and research.

Liberatory Black History Month Instruction: A Conceptual Framework

Unlike other studies to date, *this* analysis of BHM instruction focuses on teachers' BHM pedagogies *as they are* without intervention, in an attempt to better understand Black History instruction. Helping to identify the difficulties of teaching Black History in a predominantly white suburban school district, Rolling Oaks provides an exemplar of the average American school teachers' experiences. The district is demographically similar to a majority of public schools, as recent studies classified 40% of all schools as suburban (Riser-Kositsky, 2019), and NCES has identified the majority of instructors (80% +) as white and middle class (NCES, 2017).

Nine components of "Liberatory Black History Month Instructional Practice," outlined in Table 3.a, informed the analysis of teacher interviews. For this dissertation, "liberatory" instructional practices can be defined as strategies that seek to free BHM instruction from oppression, discrimination, and (physical and psychological) bondage. Liberatory instructional practices seek social change and transformation through education based on consciousness-raising, exemplified in the review of the literature (Chapter 2), where teachers (Landa, 2012; Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008) exhibited "liberatory literacies" (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Paulo Freire theorized liberatory practices in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), while more recent scholarship from Ladson-Billings and Henry (1990), and Ladson-Billings (1992, 1995) envisioned liberatory instruction for African American students. Black History scholars Oberg & Flanagan (2017) and King and Brown (2014) further identified components of liberating Black History Month pedagogies as teaching practices that free Black

History Month and Black Historical narratives from both social and psychological oppression (unjust treatment or control). Liberatory Black History Month pedagogies demand teachers' critical exploration of "traditional," Eurocentric models of Black History, require teachers' historical content knowledge and confidence, and expect the use of instructional materials that are critically assessed by students.

The framework for liberatory BHM instruction developed for this study included components of King & Brown's (2014) "effective Black History instruction," Oberg & Flanagan's (2017) assessment of "practiced communicators of African American History," and finally, Ladson-Billings' (1995) tenets of "culturally relevant instruction." This scholarship provided a basis for assessing Rolling Oaks teachers' BHM instruction and identified "content," "consciousness," and "cultural" objectives, suggesting measures that subverted Black Historical miseducation (Woodson, 2018/1933).

The liberatory BHM instructional framework centered student-focused, historically-accurate instruction meant to improve the quality of students' lives. In the analysis that follows the content, consciousness, and cultural components assist in examining the intersections of teachers' BHM praxis, the barriers they faced, and the liberatory practices they presented during BHM in this K-12 suburban school district.

Table 3.a. A Framework for Liberatory BHM Instruction

	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3
"Content"			
(EBH) **Effective Black History Instruction** (later, EBH)	(EBH.1) Black history topics are	(EBH.2) Teaching materials are	(EBH.3) Topics and Black History discussions are relevant and seek to improve

King & Brown, 2014	critically assessed by students.[15]	researched by teachers.	the quality of life for students.
"Consciousness"			
(PCBH) **Practiced Communicators of Black History** (later, PCBH) Oberg & Flanagan, 2017	(PCBH.1) Engage in scholarly research on topics of Black History.[16]	(PCBH.2) Have confidence in their knowledge of Black History topics.	(PCBH.3) Are reflective about their Black History instruction.
"Culture"			
(CRP) **Culturally Relevant Pedagogies** (later, CRP) Ladson-Billings, 1995	(CRP.1) Students experience academic success.	(CRP.2) Students develop and maintain cultural competencies.	(CRP.3) Students are empowered to question and challenge the status quo and social order.

Tenants of a liberatory, critical-historical, humanistic view of Black History instruction were theorized by Carter G. Woodson in "*The Mis-Education of the Negro*" (2018/1933). It is Woodson's scholarship that provides the inspiration for this analysis (Woodson, 2018/1933). From Woodson's focus on collaborative, humanizing, and liberatory Black History pedagogies, contemporary scholars King & Brown (2014) developed a Woodsonian "method of effective practice" as a Black epistemic framework for assessing teachers' BHM instruction. Their "effective" Black History Month instructional practices include three-steps: Black History topics are critically assessed by students; teaching materials and content are scientifically researched by teachers; and, finally, Black History topics and discussions are relevant to and seek to improve students' quality of life (King & Brown, 2014). King and Brown's "Woodsonian approach" was selected as a measure of liberatory BHM instruction as it provides accessible touchpoints for any

[15] Students may ask questions, pose alternate theories, and challenge the normative "history" as presented.
[16] Teachers also engage in critical exploration of content, researching tools and instruction before presenting during BHM.

teacher of Black History. King & Brown's (2014) measures are hereby considered "content" objectives within a teacher's liberatory BHM practice, and are respectfully labeled EBH.1, EBH.2, and EBH.3 (Table 3.a).

While providing effective BHM pedagogies, liberatory BHM instruction must be delivered by "practiced communicators" of Black History (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017). Practiced communicators engage in scholarly research on Black History topics, which may include professional learning and review of their content and objectives (labeled component PCBH.1); have confidence in their Black History content knowledge (component PCBH.2); and are reflective teacher practitioners (component PCBH.3)(Oberg & Flanagan, 2017). These practiced communicators invest time in collaboration with their colleagues, engage in fundamental Black History research, and utilize materials that include primary source documents (see Table PCBH 1-3 for more) (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017). These three components account for measures of teachers' BHM "consciousness," and will be referred to in the analysis as PCBH.1, PCBH.2, and PCBH.3.

For clarification, the third reflective practice tenant of Oberg & Flanagan's "practiced communicators of Black History" (or PCBH.3 in Table 3.a) is considered through the scholarship of Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983) for whom reflection includes a teachers' iterative instruction, starting with its beginnings in informed action and identification of a problem of practice. This reflection further includes the revision (and eventual action steps) teachers employ to improve their instruction (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983). Therefore, a teacher will be considered a reflective practitioner of Black History when they review and reflect on their Black History Month instruction and make revisions toward improvement (PCBH.3).

Finally, liberatory BHM practitioners draw heavily on culturally relevant pedagogies [CRP] (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRP are practices that encourage students' academic success (CRP.1), assist in developing students' cultural competencies (CRP.2), and empower students to challenge the social order (CRP. 3) (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant pedagogies engage students with challenging yet relatable topics while also inviting them to participate as partners in their instruction. These tenants are referred to as components CRP.1, CRP. 2, and CRP. 3, and they are identified by this researcher as addressing the overall "culture" of student-teacher relationships in BHM instructional practice.

This liberatory BHM framework utilizes critical, student-centered, teacher-researched methods of BHM in components of Ladson-Billings (1995), King & Brown (2014), and Oberg & Flanagan's (2017) research. A liberatory BHM practitioner will include the majority of the elements from each of these frames in order to liberate or "free" Black History Month instruction from its traditional, Eurocentrically informed content and culturally-embodied constraints. These content, consciousness, and cultural objectives define liberatory BHM instruction and aid in the analysis of educators' practices in Chapters 5 and 6.

To determine teachers' attempts towards liberatory BHM instruction, each of the teacher-participants' interview transcripts were individually reviewed against the tenets of liberatory BHM instruction presented in Table 3.a. Each practitioner was then given a score between zero to nine components attained. Findings for each participant will be explored in Chapter 5 and further analyzed in Chapter 6 (Tables 6.a and 6.b).

The Research Site

Rolling Oaks is a rapidly expanding mid-sized suburban school district serving more than 8,500 students across 14 schools. It is a microcosm of the American dilemma: a community of

both wealth and poverty, access and opportunity, high expectations, and disparate outcomes. Its demographics represent the American school experience as 40% of students attend suburban schools closely mirroring Rolling Oaks' demographics (DPI, 2019; Riser-Kositsky, 2019; NCES 2017).[17] Rolling Oaks is a community that could be both everywhere and nowhere at all, a charming suburb that nearly escapes consideration, making its analysis all the more important, for it is often the places that go unobserved from which we have the most to learn.

Rolling Oaks was founded in the late 1830s by white settlers traveling by ox cart. After days of inclement weather, the founders stopped by a great burr oak in the center of the prairie, finding the beauty of the area undeniable. As they carved their initials into the tree, they left a physical marker for their expected return. When these colonists, their families, and friends returned a few months later, they named the settlement "Rolling Oaks," after the beautiful tree that grew in the center of their community.[18]

In the years that followed, the community grew, and the white settlers forced the native Ho-Chunk and Peoria tribes from the land. When they built the first one-room schoolhouse in the center of town in 1841, it marked the beginning of formal education in the community of Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin (Rolling Oaks Historical Society [ROHS], (2017).

Decades later, it was "very progressive" when, in 1870, a "negro farmhand" was the first Black resident of Rolling Oaks, joining a local farm crew (Curator; ROHS, 2017).[19] The 1870s also found "colored viners" employed at the local canning company in Rolling Oaks. However, it

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[17] A further 30% of students attend city schools, 19% attend rural schools and only 11% attend small-town schools in the United States

[18] Though the tree no longer stands, its folklore is prevalent in the schools of Rolling Oaks. Each year, the Rolling Oaks second graders travel to the Rolling Oaks Historical Society (ROHS, 2017), where they are treated to narratives of their community's progress. Notably absent from the formal records are the stories of the first settlers of color, be they indigineous peoples or the first Black residents of the community.

[19] No names were recorded in any of these histories; though "colored employees and viners," were hired by the Rolling Oaks canning company in 1910.

was not until desegregation in the late 1960s that the first Black students graduated from the Woodland Springs High School (ROHS, 2017). In all, these founding Black residents' histories were sparsely recorded, challenging to find,[20] and represent the total of "Black History" on local records in the community of Rolling Oaks.

By 2019, Rolling Oaks schools served more than 38% students of color across grades K-12, up from just 20% only four years prior (Rolling Oaks Human Resources [ROHR], 2017, 2019). This rapid integration of Rolling Oaks began in the late 1990s. As Mrs. Clark (interview participant) explains,

> Rolling Oaks now has a large population of African-Americans living in [the community], but when you think of Rolling Oaks, you're not thinking of them, and neither are the original [residents]. They used to be farmers. When they think of Rolling Oaks, they're thinking of their white farm kids. It's just the way it is. Now it's much more diverse than that, and there's not a plan [to change]. (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018)

Despite the rapid demographic shifts in student population over the last 25 years, Rolling Oaks has failed to attract faculty of color to work in its schools. In the 2019-2020 school year, only 6% of Rolling Oaks' certified teachers identified as people of color. Black employees equaled less than 1% of this group - the remaining 94% of certified teachers identified as white (Rolling Oaks Human Resources, 2019).

While Rolling Oaks actively seeks to recruit and retain teachers of color (ROHS, 2019), the state of Wisconsin itself may be a deterrent to Black candidates seeking employment. Repeatedly voted "the worst in the country" for Black Americans on measures of unemployment,

[20] These histories do not make the second-grade tour of the community's history each year. In order to access them, I made a private appointment to search the historical society's records. Finding only records of the "negro farmhand" and "colored viners," the curator suggested I look at high school graduation photos to determine the year the first students of color graduated.

child poverty, incarceration, and child well-being (Schnieder, 2015; Taylor, 2014), as of fall 2019, Wisconsin

> Bears the distinction of having the worst gap between black and white [students'] academic success of any state, according to new results of the National Assessment of Education Progress — known as the Nation's Report Card (Beck, 2019).

This educational attainment "gap" now identified as "the worst" is not an anomaly, as Wisconsin has maintained the widest Black-white achievement gap in the nation (as assessed by NAEP) across seven of the last ten years (Millet, 2019).[21]

In the community of Rolling Oaks, this "gap" has been exacerbated by elementary redistricting plans that have privileged "community schools"[22] over schools that are racially, socioeconomically, and linguistically representative of the community.[23] The school boundaries and their resulting disparate outcomes have only exacerbated the "educational debt" owed

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[21] In 2006, Dr. Ladson-Billings reframed the historical "gap" in achievement as an "educational debt." This debt encompasses not only the disproportionate academic outcomes experienced by students of color and their white counterparts but includes consideration of the missing histories of people of color in schools. Furthermore, the debt also entails the educational, economic, and social subjugation they have experienced. (Ladson-Billings, 2006)

[22] Scholars who study school segregation, integration, and equality have commented on the notion of 'community schools' in the following ways: "No matter by what new name segregated education may be known, whether it be 'neighborhood schools, community schools, targeted schools, priority schools,' or whatever other currently accepted term, 'segregation is not new . . . and neither is the idea of making separate schools equal'" (Kozol, 2005, *The Shame of the Nation: Restoration of Apartheid schooling in America*).
"[districts] often rely on coded racial language which suggests that "community," (maintaining predominantly white schools) is more important than "disruption for diversity." (Lewis-McCoy, 2015, *Inequality in the Promised Land: Race, Resources, and Suburban Schooling*)
"A constellation of factors, many of which are related to segregation and the boundary lines that help solidify it, is responsible for the persistence of achievement and opportunity gaps." (Siegel-Hawley, 2016, *When the Fences Come Down: Twenty First Century Lessons from Metropolitan School Desegregation)*

[23] The resulting boundaries provided one of Rolling Oaks' less affluent schools with 48% students of color and 49% of students receiving free and reduced lunch (indicating low socioeconomic status), while another school served just 12% students of color and only 4% of students receiving free and reduced lunch (ROHR, 2017; DPI, 2019).

(Ladson-Billings, 2006) to Rolling Oaks' students of color, most of whom receive instruction in the community's Title I schools.[24]

In 2019, each of Rolling Oaks' schools received ratings based on attainment towards state standardized testing growth. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) schools may be rated: significantly exceeds expectations, exceeds expectations, meeting expectations, meets few expectations or fails to meet expectations (DPI, 2019). Rolling Oaks' Title I buildings received ratings of "meeting few expectations" or merely "meeting expectations" in terms of student academic outcomes, as assessed by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI, 2019). In the same measures of progress, Rolling Oaks' more affluent (and predominantly white) schools were assessed as "exceeding expectations" or "significantly exceeding expectations" on School Report Cards (DPI, 2019).[25] These inequitable academic outcomes find Rolling Oaks' students of color experiencing significant inequities in educational attainment. The most recent (2019) district report cards (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [DPI], 2019) finds Rolling Oaks' Black students to be proficient or advanced in reading and math only 10 to 11% of the time when compared to a district average of 42 to 44% of students overall (DPI, 2019) [see also Tables 3.b. and 3.c. below]. Despite these significant gaps in student achievement by race, Rolling Oaks is consistently considered a district "exceeding expectations" by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI, 2019), rendering the impact of these systemic inequities (and their matching instructional practices) relatively invisible.

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[24] Title I designation is a governmental designation that has been used as a method of providing additional assistance to schools with a certain percentage of economically disadvantaged students, as determined by family income. This designation began with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and continues today (NCES, 2019).

[25] Notably, all of the elementary and middle school participants who volunteered for interviews were from Rolling Oaks' Title I buildings.

Table 3.b. Rolling Oaks' District Report Card 2019, Language Arts Data (DPI, 2019)

English Language Arts Supplemental Data

Group	2016-17					2017-18					2018-19				
	Total Tested	Percent Advanced	Percent Proficient	Percent Basic	Percent Below Basic	Total Tested	Percent Advanced	Percent Proficient	Percent Basic	Percent Below Basic	Total Tested	Percent Advanced	Percent Proficient	Percent Basic	Percent Below Basic
All Students: State	572,116	9.5%	33.8%	33.9%	22.7%	572,332	8.5%	33.7%	34.0%	23.7%	570,957	8.0%	32.7%	34.1%	25.3%
All Students: District	5,050	11.7%	36.6%	31.7%	20.0%	5,141	11.3%	36.6%	32.2%	19.9%	5,135	10.3%	36.5%	32.6%	20.6%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	<20	*	*	*	*	<20	*	*	*	*	<20	*	*	*	*
Asian	418	13.4%	37.8%	31.6%	17.2%	443	11.7%	39.1%	34.3%	14.9%	473	11.4%	40.0%	30.9%	17.8%
Black or African American	486	0.4%	11.1%	32.9%	55.6%	503	0.2%	10.9%	32.4%	56.5%	486	1.2%	10.7%	33.1%	54.9%
Hispanic/Latino	444	4.7%	31.1%	36.0%	28.2%	480	4.6%	27.3%	38.3%	29.8%	470	5.3%	24.7%	39.6%	30.4%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<20	*	*	*	*	<20	*	*	*	*	<20	*	*	*	*
White	3,306	14.4%	41.6%	30.6%	13.3%	3,322	14.1%	42.2%	31.0%	12.7%	3,296	12.3%	42.5%	31.2%	14.0%
Two or More Races	382	8.9%	31.4%	34.3%	25.4%	383	9.4%	31.1%	31.1%	28.5%	401	9.2%	28.7%	37.4%	24.7%
Students with Disabilities	552	1.8%	10.0%	25.5%	62.7%	569	2.3%	11.4%	25.0%	61.3%	562	1.1%	12.8%	24.2%	61.9%
Economically Disadvantaged	1,238	1.9%	19.8%	36.3%	42.0%	1,428	3.6%	19.2%	36.7%	40.5%	1,423	2.2%	20.2%	35.1%	42.5%
English Learners	537	4.7%	27.9%	39.1%	28.3%	579	5.2%	27.1%	40.8%	26.9%	575	4.5%	26.6%	39.5%	29.4%

Table 3.c. Rolling Oaks' District Report Card 2019, Mathematics Data (DPI, 2019)

Mathematics Supplemental Data

Group	2016-17					2017-18					2018-19				
	Total Tested	Percent Advanced	Percent Proficient	Percent Basic	Percent Below Basic	Total Tested	Percent Advanced	Percent Proficient	Percent Basic	Percent Below Basic	Total Tested	Percent Advanced	Percent Proficient	Percent Basic	Percent Below Basic
All Students: State	573,124	8.3%	32.3%	32.2%	27.2%	573,251	9.2%	32.6%	31.2%	27.0%	571,751	9.4%	31.6%	30.8%	28.2%
All Students: District	5,053	11.5%	36.5%	29.8%	22.1%	5,146	13.1%	36.7%	28.6%	21.6%	5,129	13.4%	34.8%	28.6%	23.2%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	<20	*	*	*	*	<20	*	*	*	*	<20	*	*	*	*
Asian	418	15.3%	38.0%	30.9%	15.8%	443	19.4%	35.2%	31.8%	13.5%	473	20.5%	34.9%	28.3%	16.3%
Black or African American	490	0.8%	9.8%	25.5%	63.9%	505	0.2%	10.9%	25.5%	63.4%	483	2.1%	9.1%	25.1%	63.8%
Hispanic/Latino	445	4.7%	29.7%	31.9%	33.7%	483	6.0%	25.7%	35.2%	33.1%	468	6.0%	22.9%	33.5%	37.6%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<20	*	*	*	*	<20	*	*	*	*	<20	*	*	*	*
White	3,305	14.3%	42.0%	29.4%	14.2%	3,322	16.0%	43.1%	27.1%	13.8%	3,293	15.7%	41.1%	28.0%	15.2%
Two or More Races	381	5.2%	29.9%	35.4%	29.4%	383	6.8%	31.6%	33.4%	28.2%	403	8.7%	28.3%	32.8%	30.3%
Students with Disabilities	552	2.0%	11.2%	22.6%	64.1%	573	3.5%	11.2%	22.9%	62.5%	558	3.2%	10.2%	21.5%	65.1%
Economically Disadvantaged	1,238	2.2%	15.3%	33.6%	48.9%	1,435	4.1%	18.6%	33.3%	44.0%	1,419	3.9%	17.5%	31.8%	46.7%
English Learners	541	6.8%	25.7%	36.0%	31.4%	581	9.3%	26.0%	35.5%	29.3%	573	10.1%	24.6%	34.0%	31.2%

Researcher Positionality

In this research study, my positionality is an essential component for consideration. As a researcher-participant, teacher-educator, parent, and community member, my proximity and privilege have allowed nearly unfettered access to the teachers, classrooms, and K-12 buildings of the Rolling Oaks School District. Noting these privileges, the importance of identifying my interest in this research is paramount. I invite the reader into my positionality by asking and answering: why me? why this? why now?

Why me?

Within the context of this research, my positionality is tied up within the analysis. As a white teacher who fits the demographic majority of this study's focus, I am part of the 94% white teachers in the Rolling Oaks School District (ROHR, 2019). It was as a teacher in this district that my research first came into focus, and it is from this same, privileged vantage that I hope to offer an "inside look" at the "white talk" (Sleeter in McIntyre, 1997) and experience the (majority white) teachers' BHM instruction in the community of Rolling Oaks.

Before moving to Rolling Oaks, I spent my formative years in St. Louis, Missouri, in a community with similar demographics. My middle-class suburban school district served a diverse racial and socioeconomic student body, as mandatory St. Louis city desegregation busing brought students of color to my town. My teachers were predominantly white, except for my elementary music teacher Dr. Bacheldor,[26] who taught us about Scott Joplin and encouraged us to "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (Johnson & Johnson, 1917). Meanwhile, at home, my family's Christian beliefs and idealistic white outlook perpetuated what I now understand to be neoliberal ideologies of meritocracy and colorblindness. Don't get me wrong; I am proud of my upbringing. Both my teachers and parents were (are) loving and accepting, and they suggested I should be the same. When I grew up to be a teacher, I began teaching the way I was taught, telling my students they could do anything, be anything, and go anywhere, if they only worked hard enough and believed in themselves.

Then, as I began work as a second-grade teacher in Chicago Public Schools, I learned more from my students than I taught them. The 28 immigrant and refugee students who arrived

[26] Thank you, Dr. Bacheldor (a pseudonym).

in my first classroom included two white students,[27] only one of whom was born in the United States. These children spoke more than sixteen languages and were from Bosnia, Nigeria, Somalia, the Czech Republic, Venezuela, and the United States. Their families were patient, and trusted me to support their children, *teaching me* when I did not understand. Some of the students prayed to Mecca in class; others had elaborate celebrations they would share (such as smooshing cupcakes for good luck). All of my students' families had high expectations for students' growth, realistic visions of the American educational system, and helped me to see their child's possibilities as endless, despite the racism, xenophobia, and economic disparities they may experience. The lessons I learned from my students and their families were hard and fast, and rarely matched what I experienced as a child.[28]

Please do not think that I have transcended from my ignorance. Instead, I am now more consciously aware of my positionality, having the luxury of willing teachers (my students), formative experiences, and the privilege of entering the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin.

Between the birth of my first child and entering graduate school, we moved to Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin. We selected the community for its proximity to the University of Wisconsin (as I hoped to return to graduate school), and for the positive reviews of the local school system. In Rolling Oaks, I quickly took up employment as a second-grade teacher, and although I was teaching the same grade, my classroom was very different. I only had seventeen students, all of

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[27] I taught at a Chicago Public Charter School serving families from Asian Human Services, a Chicago-based refugee assistance community which began the school to serve its students. It was ignorance alone that landed me there -- I went knocking on doors of schools over the summer, and this building was closest to my home. I will forever be in debt to the families and, more importantly, the students I learned from in service to that school.

[28] For example, during a parent-teacher conference, I offended a parent by offering my hand to shake and saying hello. He later told me that in his religious observance, both of these were unacceptable for a stranger, and especially a woman at that.

whom spoke English. I had very few students of color, and all of them were from the United States, although they were from white, Black, Hmong, and Latinx backgrounds.

While teaching second grade in both Chicago and Rolling Oaks, I engaged in what I perceived to be positive BHM instructional practices. I leaned heavily on the narratives of Martin Luther King Jr., hoping to teach my students empathy, gratitude, and acceptance. I presented stories of Black heroes like Jackie Robinson, Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, and Henry "Box" Brown, which now I see only further essentialized my students' experiences of American history. I presented Black figures as monolithic heroes found only in the past. Despite my best efforts, my BHM instruction denied the complexities of Black History, controlling the narrative from my white-dominant positionality. When compared to measures of liberatory BHM praxis explored in Chapter 5's analysis, I identify my instructional practice from those days in second grade as "not yet" providing liberatory BHM instruction (see Table 6.1, Chapter 6, or Table 3.a).

Further reflection on the miseducation I reinforced was not possible until I began taking Dr. Carl Grant's 900 level classes on Black Intellectual Thought. After entering the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin Madison, I began reading the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Alaine Locke, and Anna Julia Cooper. These scholars' writing felt urgent, and held resonance in the classrooms of Rolling Oaks, despite the nearly 100 years since their publications. I began waking at night, taken by the realization that I was a white teacher who could talk about racial injustice, even identify it, but had not explored my culpability in perpetuating deficit narratives through negligent instruction (including BHM instruction). During that same semester, I observed the teachers' instruction I shared in the opening to this study ("why isn't there a white history month"). At the time, I did nothing to

interrupt the conversation, nor knew how to address it. It was this instance that served as inspiration for this study.

Why This?

In finding the reality of my own and my colleagues' BHM instruction, "my anger was directed at an education that facilitated the interpretation of given narratives but not the interrogation of how the narratives were made historically possible in the first place" (Popkewitz, 1999. 397). My education, at home and in school perpetuated my miseducation. My white identity wrapped me in a safety net from within I could not see the strings. It is finally now, becoming conscious of the biased histories of both my home and school settings, that I feel free to see the world and question its making. It is not my anger at the system that encourages this study, for that would entice frustration without action. Instead, this study is an exploration into the possibilities of current and future instruction. It is not intended as an intervention, and should not be regarded in that manner. It is only through understanding how we collectively teach Black History in the present moment that will allow for reflective practices and open the possibility for a future in which we may embody Carter G. Woodson's humanizing, liberatory Black Historical education such that the observance of BHM may no longer be necessary.

Why now?

In an era of national upheaval, where repeated white supremacist acts are condoned by America's highest officials, the necessity of reviewing practices that privilege marginalized voices are paramount. Black History Month in 2018 and 2019 have found instruction that has served primarily as a tool of humiliation, where students are subject to the "educative psychic violence" that follows misappropriated historical instruction (King & Woodson, 2017).

As a researcher-participant, school-based equity-team member, and provider of professional development to Rolling Oaks' district faculty and staff, my intersectional roles allow me to visit multiple buildings, district representatives, and teachers routinely.[29] Although advantaged, I am not in a position of evaluation for any participant, teacher, school, or district program, removing potential issues of coercion and bias.

Critical Terminology

In this research study, the term "Black History" references what has been historically termed "African American History," "African American (Black) History, "Afro-American History," and "Negro History." "African American History" has been avoided as a catch-all term as it suggests Black History starts with Black enslavement within the United States, negating a robust history in Africa and across the African diaspora (King, 2018).

"Black History" is used to refer not only to the history and experience of those with a "Black" phenotype but also as a recognition of the comprehensive and evolving history of African and ethnically Black individuals throughout the world. Further, the terms "Negro," "Black," and "African American" may be used in reference to "Black" Americans, mirroring the literature or interviews the terms are drawn from. While Black is used as a self-descriptive term by people from multiple global identities, the researcher understands that Black Americans contend with racism and historical erasure that is singular (and requires homage) in the American construct.

[29] In acknowledgment of these intersectional identities, and the possibility for bias, a reflexivity journal was included in the comprehensive study analysis. This journal provided a space for an honest appraisal of the researchers' experiences over the course of this study. It further served as a place to collect issues of bias/bracketing (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2003, p.9) and provided a multilayered perspective from which to add to the themes and findings, which will be further addressed in Chapter 5.

In this dissertation, the term "white" "refer[s] to Americans of European descent" (Tatum, 1997, p.15). These white individuals can identify or present as white, though I acknowledge that "whiteness" is not only internalized by white individuals. Miseducation (Woodson, 2018/1933, King, 1991), but has allowed "whiteness" a term appropriately applied to any teacher, regardless of race or ethnic background, whom educates *or was educated* through "whitewashed," Eurocentric pedagogies. These white-conscious teachers' practices have been sanitized, resulting in dysconscious (subconscious and unintentional) ignorance that impacts even the most "liberal" educators. Though ethnically diverse, these "enwhitened" individuals (Matias, 2016) stand to receive both critique and apology for the miseducation that led them to this "white" consciousness. Though it is necessary to explore these nuances in future research, this dissertation will draw on (primarily) phenotypically white teachers' practices during Black History Month.

Unlike the term "Black," "white" is presented in lowercase. The term "white" is an adjective denoting the color and culture of "white" individuals, and yet, it is rarely used in self-reference or as a characteristic of a group membership. This study is not the first to use this structure of capitalization, drawing on the work of Matias (2016, p.xvii); and Visconti (2005) for instruction in these measures.

In addition to these racialized terms,[30] I acknowledge that "race" is a concept of social construction, with no bearing in scientific "difference." Importantly, scholars Zirkel and Johnson (2016) "have distinguished between the labels Black and "white" as indicative of two different realities, revealing the constructed-ness of labels and how equating them plays into exclusionary mythologies" (Laughter, 2018). These exclusionary mythologies were confirmed

[30] Racialized denotes placing in a racial context.

by King's (2018) research, which asserts, "what is historically relevant to white people, may not be historically relevant to Black people." On account of these discrepancies, King outlines the need to address the complexities of racialized understanding *in* a historical context (King, 2018). Finally, as "Black" and "white" are socially, legally, economically, and politically constructed categories, I grant there are difficulties in using such simplistic designations, and ask for the reader's patience in these efforts.

Research Limitations

There are systemic and structural limitations within any research into educational systems. Limitations in this study are more aligned with systems of educational policy than resulting from any inherent barriers put up by the participants or the Rolling Oaks school district. There are, however, limitations in vocabulary (addressed above), in the social construction of these terms and ideas (addressed momentarily), in this researchers' white epistemic reality (as outlined in the researcher positionality), and those showcased in the literature addressing white teachers and black history as presented throughout Chapter 2.

The Social Construction of Race:

As problems of race do not exist in a Black and white binary, such simplistic discourse is problematic, as are the limited perimeters of this study. Despite these challenges, analysis of "predominantly white teachers" practices allow for an explicit conversation around the often neglected complexities found in the intersections of race and educational practice.

Scholars Smith-Maddox & Solorzano (2002) argued, "many critical race theorists (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1995) are going beyond the view that race is a dichotomy based on social construction or biological factors. They recognize that race is central to people's lives" (Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002). Race and its centrality to the 94% white teachers of Rolling Oaks'

schools is a significant factor in their teaching. Further, the complexities of BHM instruction necessitates a review of both teachers' visions of historical positivism and constructivism, alongside what they "know to be true." These social constructions of history collide with the layers of miseducation that many of these teachers received in a primarily white, Eurocentric education (Trouillet, 1995). The conflicting elements of teacher and students' race and the positivist and constructivist Black Histories they present are at battle within American schools, and therefore within the community of Rolling Oaks.

By focusing on Rolling Oaks' predominantly white teachers teaching Black History during BHM, one may encounter the intersection of these sociological and historically fluid constructs in practice. This narrow focus on predominantly white teachers' teaching Black History during Black History Month allows the analysis of challenges and practices *as they are,* rather than as we hope them to be. While the researcher acknowledges that Black History Month *alone* (in place of all Black History practice) offers another narrow focus, the impacts of BHM teaching practice holds resonance in students' self-concept, understandings of power, and their collective identities (Chapman-Hilliard & Adams Bass, 2004). In the absence of any literature formally addressing these intersections in the instruction of America's predominantly white teachers, these considerations are not to be ignored.

Chapter 4. Districtwide Black History Instructional Practices

Chapter 4 presents the first of two data sets in answer to research question one: How do Rolling Oaks' teachers provide Black History instruction in and around Black History Month?

The districtwide BHM survey provided a foundation from which to compare Rolling Oaks teachers' experiences teaching Black History during BHM (Chapter 5). The results of the survey include the percentage of Rolling Oaks K-12 teachers' who teach Black History, their self-reported levels of preparedness, and the subjects (including people, movements, and ideas) they addressed during BHM. The results provide quasi-statistics from which to ground further data analysis. They offer a birds-eye view of K-12 BHM instruction in the community of Rolling Oaks.

Rolling Oaks Teachers' Black History Month Instruction:

A BHM survey was available to Rolling Oaks school faculty from spring 2017-fall 2019 (Appendix A.2). The survey ultimately engaged 217 of Rolling Oaks' K-12 teachers in a review of their BHM instruction. The survey enabled interview participants to volunteer for BHM discussion in one-on-one interviews.

Survey respondents included grade-level teachers, instructional specialists (such as art and music teachers), and represented kindergarten through twelfth grade. The total survey respondents account for 29% of Rolling Oaks certified faculty. 45% of these participants were elementary school teachers (grades K-5), while another 29% were middle school teachers (grades 6-9). The remaining 26% of participants were high school teachers (grades 10-12).

The Survey Questions

Survey Q1: Do you teach Black History?

Of the 217 survey respondents, 69% of respondents (149 participants) indicated they teach Black History during Black History Month (see Figure 4.a), suggesting a majority of Rolling Oaks' K-12 teachers teach Black History. Although the high occurrence of BHM instruction was promising, scholars have found that "despite teachers' enthusiasm about teaching Black history, the [recent NMAAHC] study surmised that generally only 1 to 2 lessons or 8–9 percent of total class time is devoted to Black history in U.S. history classrooms" (King, 2018). The time allotted to BHM instruction, the content and impact of teachers' Black History observances deserve further review.

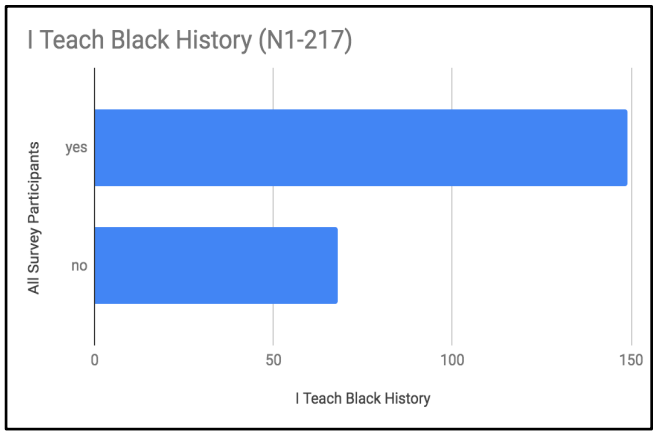


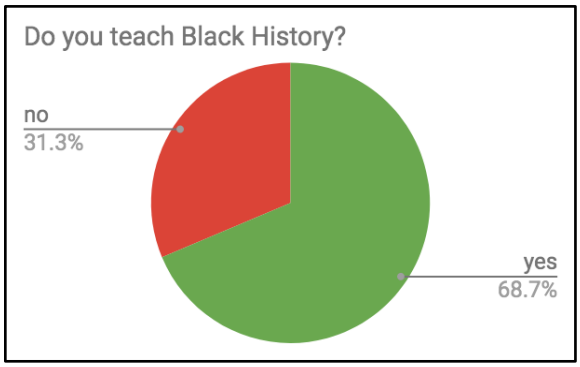
Figure 4.a. Total Respondents who teach Black History

The remaining 31% of participants reported they do not teach Black History. Participants not teaching Black History included math, science, English-as-a-second language teachers, and special education teachers, most of whom were from middle school grades 6-9 (38%) and high school levels grades 10-12 (50% of participants not teaching Black History). Elementary teachers represented only 24% of teachers who do not teach Black History, despite accounting for 49% of the total survey respondents. The high incidence of middle and high school teachers

who do not teach Black History suggests that departmentalized instruction in the middle and high school grades makes it challenging to include Black History, as high school math teacher N40 said, “It's tough to [include Black History] without feeling awkward about shoehorning it in at times. Maybe it's because I'm in the math classroom” (N40). High school participant N81 shared that even though BHM is pushed at yearly faculty meetings as something to teach during February, “I feel like it's not really focused on as a whole school, and when it is, we do so shallowly.” N80 goes on to say, “since I'm not a history teacher, I feel like it isn't always a strong fit into my curriculum” (N80). The absence of Black History or BHM instruction in teachers’ classrooms regardless of subject focus suggests that for some teachers, Black History instruction is only perceived viable in particular subject areas, limiting the exposure and influence of BHM within the Rolling Oaks’ school district.

Survey Q2: Do you feel adequately prepared to teach Black History?

Of the 149 respondents who reported teaching Black History during Black History Month, only 28.6% felt adequately prepared for their instruction (Figures 4.b and 4.c).



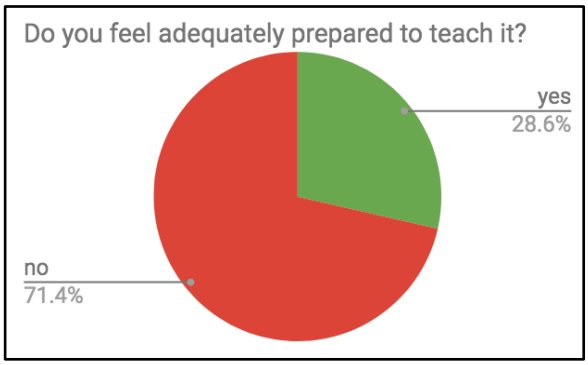


Figure 4.b. Do you teach Black History? **Figure 4.c. Do you feel adequately prepared?**

This self-reported lack of preparedness was widely shared amongst interview participants and presented itself as a barrier towards BHM instruction. Preparedness, which in the context of this dissertation is defined as a state of readiness for instruction, was found to be most often

impacted by the participants' feelings of guilt, discomfort, and lack of Black historical knowledge.

Survey participants "not prepared" commented on barriers towards preparedness, which included a lack of resources and instructional time, or the instructor's sparse historical knowledge. Participant N61, a middle school literacy teacher's rationale, represents views commonly shared by survey participants. She said,

> I do not feel adequately prepared to teach Black History. I feel that we do not have all the resources given to us to be able to teach our students about Black History. I just Google information, websites, and worksheets for students to do, but that's not enough. I do not think that I am prepared for the questions that will be asked, or for how to prepare students to learn about a very important part of our history...but a very difficult topic about the cruelty and difficulties African Americans faced and still face today. Additionally, we focus a lot on the civil rights movement and the important figures during the movement, but I should be prepared to talk about [African Americans'] entire history, from when they came to the US to now. However, I do not feel that I could. (N61, survey response)

N61 identifies a variety of limitations to BHM instruction. These limitations include content, as provided by district and school, consciousness, in terms of the instructor's Black historical knowledge, and cultural concerns, which impact students' daily lives. These components of liberatory BHM instruction are reviewed in stories of teachers' BHM instruction (Chapter 5).

Participants who considered themselves prepared for BHM instruction accounted for 28.6% of all teachers who reported teaching Black History during BHM. The majority of these participants cited the practices used to improve their BHM instruction. One such practice was

attending professional development sessions outside Rolling Oaks. As a fifth-grade teacher, N99 expressed, after attending professional development, "I do [feel prepared for BHM instruction] in that I have done my own research on it. The curriculum/district does not support this in any way." Despite feeling prepared, N99 goes on to say, "As a white female, I don't know that I have credentials. I would like to be able to teach it in the way I think it should be taught." N99's response suggests that despite content preparedness, consciousness, and confidence in instructional practice may provide another barrier during BHM instruction.

Survey Q3: What do you teach during Black History Month?

The 149 survey participants teaching Black History during Black History Month identified 500 discrete subjects (including people, movements, and ideas) taught during BHM. After analyzing their 500 responses, 198 unique subjects were found to be addressed during BHM across grades K-12 (Appendix B).[31] These results assisted in the identification of instructional topics that were privileged, including a focus on Black figures, events, ideas, and historical movements.

Further review of the 198 BHM topics found *only 22* subjects taught by five or more K-12 teachers during Black History Month. Each of these 22 responses accounted for 1% or more of the total and is thereby considered a salient BHM subject/topic in the community of Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin. Table 4.d presents topics that received between 1.5% and 10% of total survey responses. Table 4.e shows those who received more than 1%, but less than 1.4% of the total.

[31] After further review, and combining responses that were similar, selections such as "Black authors," and "books by Black writers," were condensed into one category, allowing for the list to be further reduced.

Table 4.d		
Topics with more than 1.5%-10% of total responses		
Subject/ Topic	#	%
Martin Luther King Jr.	50	10%
Civil Rights	31	6%
Rosa Parks	31	6%
Ruby Bridges	24	5%
Enslavement	16	3%
Nothing	11	2%
Black Lives Matter	9	(0.018) or 1.8%
Jackie Robinson	8	(0.016) or 1.6%
Underground Railroad	8	(0.016) or 1.6%
Segregation	8	(0.016) or 1.6%
Black Authors	8	(0.016) or 1.6%

Table 4.e		
Topics with less than 1.4% of total responses		
Subject/ Topic	#	%
Harriet Tubman	7	(0.014) or 1.4%
Booker T. Washington	7	(0.014) or 1.4%
W.E.B. Du Bois	7	(0.014) or 1.4%
Malcolm X	6	(0.012) or 1.2%
Diverse Books	6	(0.012) or 1.2%
Jazz	6	(0.012) or 1.2%
The World/Today's Issues	6	(0.012) or 1.2%
Biographies	5	1%
Great Depression	5	1%
Obama	5	1%
Scott Joplin	5	1%

The most prevalent BHM instructional subjects/topics identified by survey participants included Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights, Rosa Parks, and Ruby Bridges. These four responses accounted for 27% of BHM instructional topics addressed districtwide.[32] Later reiterated in the responses of teacher-interviewees, these topics were especially significant at the elementary level. These responses validate the findings of prior BHM researchers who assert that America's predominantly white teachers primarily present "heroes and saviors" as additive measures on top of the Eurocentric curriculum (King & Brown, 2014). Celebrations of Martin

[32] Participants were responding to the prompt, "Topics I cover during Black History Month. . . (Please share any people, events, or topics you focus on, including curricular resources.)" as outlined in Appendix A.1

Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Ruby Bridges are used to further savior narratives that promote a "feel good" version of Black History that is commonplace in schools (King, 2018, King & Woodson, 2017).

The top four survey responses were followed in prevalence by teaching enslavement at 3%, "nothing" (as in the absence of teaching Black History) at 2%, Black Lives Matter at 1.8%, Black authors at 1.6%, Jackie Robinson at 1.6%, Harriet Tubman at 1.4%, Malcolm X at 1.2%, and diverse books at 1.2%. Former President Barack Obama received 1% of the total response, as did teaching Black biographies, the great depression, and composer Scott Joplin.

Subjects addressed during BHM varied greatly across elementary, middle, and high school participants. While some participants listed subjects or topics they teach, others provided short narrative accounts of their instruction. A sample of K-12 practitioners' responses are provided for comparison:

What do you teach during Black History Month?

> **Kindergarten:** "This year I am teaching Black inventors. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was also highlighted. In the past I have taught Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges and some black fables like John Henry and Anasi" (N141).
>
> **First:** "Martin Luther King Jr. discussions" (N49).
>
> **Second:** "MLK, Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges, segregation, choices, having dreams, etc" (N94).
>
> **Third:** "Famous Black authors, inventors, historical figures, civil rights leaders and athletes, civil rights movement" (N130).
>
> **Fourth:** "I try to talk about MLK Jr. and then work to infuse Black History into reading/writing and social studies" (N99).
>
> **Fifth: "**We have a civil rights unit reading workshop unit... we try our best to start it in February. We also use Brain Pop videos for our brain breaks (after specials/ recess) on famous African Americans and events" (N108).

Sixth: "History of BHM, student-selected topics (athletes, BLM, historical figures, events, etc.)"(N143).

Seventh: "Famous black authors and their work" (N103).

Eighth: "We share videos and thoughts during resource hour, [and I] take classes to attend any special presentations that are offered" (N132).

Ninth: "Whatever pops up: Woodson's original purpose. Who Frederick Douglass IS" (N40).

Tenth: "Social Justice Movements, BLM, Impact of African-American Authors and filmmakers" (N167).

Eleventh: "Jim Crow society, social Darwinism, Booker T Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, Jazz, Great Depression & New Deal, World War I and World War II, Double V Campaign, CORE, March on Washington, A. Philip Randolph" (N173).

Twelfth: "MLK JR., Malcolm X., Rosa Parks, I use *Finding Your Roots* on PBS, I also use primary sources I can find" (N105).

The limited subjects identified across this sample are representative of the K-12 data. While a few teachers listed a breadth of topics (such as this 11th-grade example) or suggested they integrate Black History throughout the year, many confirmed a reliance on "teaching" Martin Luther King Jr., Ruby Bridges, and the civil rights movement as primary instructional content. Beyond a few 5th grade teachers referring to their civil rights literacy unit (discussed in Mrs. Clark's interview in Chapter 5), no references to district-provided materials, objectives, or instructional practices were found. These findings suggest that BHM instruction led by teacher's discretion breeds inconsistency in instructional practices and focus across grade level, building, and content area.

Survey Q4: Do you have any suggestions for improved Black History Month instruction?

In question four of the survey, respondents had the chance to provide suggestions for improved BHM instruction. Some participants requested additional professional development or training. Other participants suggested books, videos, and "stuff" that would assist in BHM instruction. Finally, some respondents asked for help addressing issues of whiteness and emotionality, citing discomfort discussing race and the painful realities of Black History as prevalent barriers to their BHM instruction.

Beyond these requests, participants who felt themselves "prepared" for Black History instruction provided examples of practices they perceived improved their BHM instruction. These practices included outside professional development (34 respondents) and book studies on topics of race and access.[33] Participants further reported success integrating Black History instruction throughout the year, rather than seeing it tied to February, as one participant shared, "I focus on the historical perspectives of Black Americans during the entire school year and not just in one month" (N93).

Teachers went on to identify barriers encountered during BHM instruction. These teacher-reported needs (recorded in bold below) are examples that represent three components of liberatory BHM instruction, including: content, consciousness, and cultural barriers found when teaching Black History in and around BHM.

Teachers need additional Black History Month professional development

This content-focused barrier suggests that teachers need additional support to develop in their knowledge of Black History. "We need more PD that specifically trains white teachers (like

[33] Examples of book study texts included "*Despite the Best Intentions*" (Lewis & Diamond, 2015), "*We Want to do More than Survive*" (Love, 2019), *"All American Boys*" (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015), and "*The Guide for White Women Who Teach Black Boys*" (Moore, Michael, & Penick Parks, eds. 2018).

me) how to teach Black History" (N181).[34] Another participant shared, "I would appreciate optional professional development where we can research and provide information for teachers across the district to share" (N190).

Teachers need instruction around difficult conversations about race and history:

Beyond content-focused objectives, teachers report the need for building consciousness and cultural awareness of systemic inequities and whiteness.

> I would like to learn how other teachers teach sensitive topics pertaining to African Americans' history as well as how they set up their classrooms so our white students understand the impact white people had in history but still feel they can participate and talk about these things and not feel awkward or too uncomfortable to say anything. (N61)

Participant N61 echoes the concerns of other participants who express a barrier in waiting for someone to help "solve" the discomfort of teaching about racial inequities. Such a request speaks to many teachers' lack of awareness of societal inequities, an awareness which proves impactful as an educator in a predominantly white institution.

Teachers need resources for BHM instruction

Many survey participants were hopeful that a curricular tool could provide assistance teaching during BHM. "I would like to have more resources, relevant current material, readily available for teachers to use. Rather than having to find it on my own, I would like there to be a shared place" (N188). While a number of survey participants echoed N188's need for more instructional materials, few addressed what these materials might include.

Teachers' requests for additional BHM materials provides one avenue for improved BHM instruction, provided the materials are vetted, and researched *with* the educators who will

[34] N=Number of participant in the survey. All quotes are taken directly from this resource, and cited using the participant number.

use them. Providing ready-made BHM instructional materials may exacerbate miseducation in BHM instruction. As scholars suggest, “Black history knowledge required by the curriculum is often additive and superficial” (King, 2017, p.17). Utilizing such prepared resources without augmenting instructors’ Black History knowledge could lead to teachers who silence the experiences and voices of Black people “in favor of the dominant Eurocentric history curriculum” (King, 2017, p.17). Without teacher participation in research and continued review of BHM materials and curriculum, providing districtwide BHM materials could lead to teachers who “teach *about* Black history and not *through* it (King, 2017, p.17).

Teachers need to integrate Black History instruction beyond BHM

While some teachers have found success teaching during BHM, many admit a barrier towards instruction is the integration of Black History across all content areas. As N54 suggests, “I think we need to find a way to teach it more than just this month. It needs to be interwoven in the curriculum throughout the year” (N54). Other participants, such as N182, say, *“*I would like to spread out teaching about Black History throughout the year, rather than just in one month. I am not sure how to go about doing this effectively, but I feel like I could do more justice to the people and events in history if I did it this way” (N182).

Participant concerns for BHM-focused professional development, facilitation of difficult conversations about race and history, additional resources for BHM, and measures for integrating Black History instruction beyond February are barriers towards confident BHM instruction. Recognizing, and moving to remedy these barriers would allow districts and communities to support teachers in further development of content, consciousness, and cultural competencies during BHM and beyond.

BHM Instruction in the Community of Rolling Oaks

Rolling Oaks' BHM survey results suggest that teachers lack content, consciousness, and cultural knowledge of Black History, exacerbating the challenge of teaching in and around BHM. While a majority of Rolling Oaks' teachers provide Black History instruction (69%), only a small percentage of the teachers report feeling prepared (28.6%). The teachers provide a variety of reasons for this "lack" of preparedness, including minimal professional development, inadequate resources, and limited time for instructional research or implementation. These concerns, along with issues of white emotionality and "fear" point to systemic barriers that limit Black History instruction in the community of Rolling Oaks.

While feeling discomfort in their BHM instruction, teachers maintained a focus on heroic Black figures (Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Jackie Robinson), confirming King & Woodson's (2017) assertion that Black exceptionalism remains teachers' primary observance during BHM. Heroic figures accounted for 45% of Rolling Oaks' salient responses. Well-known heroes and saviors accounted for 30% of responses, while a further 15% of responses featured individuals such as Afeni Shakur, Bobby Seale, Carter G. Woodson, and Donald Glover (Appendix B).

Closely following Black heroes in prevalence, 22% of Rolling Oaks K-12 BHM instruction covered topics of Black subjugation, including enslavement, Jim Crow, segregation, and civil rights. This finding confirms the findings of SPLC (2018), King (2018), King (2017) & NMAAHC (2016) who suggest narratives of Black persecution are frequently centered in white teachers' observances of Black History. These teachers' hyper-focus on narratives of Black suffering and subjugation positions BHM as only valid "in the wake" of chattel slavery (Sharpe,

2016) further dehumanizing the Black experience (Woodson 2018/1933; Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Hartman & Wilderson, 2003), despite teachers well-meaning intent.

Districtwide survey findings suggest that 67% of Rolling Oaks' BHM instruction exists in a dichotomy, where Black subjugation is solved by the "triumph" of the civil rights movement, and/or maintained by a few notable heroes. The remaining 33% of the teacher's BHM instruction includes observances of Black History in art, literature, music, events (such as the March on Washington), critical discussions, modern movements and "student interests."

While some barriers to BHM instruction may be remedied through collaboration,[35] others, such as the enormous variance in Black History topics and subject matter, and teachers' reported lack of preparation for BHM instruction suggest that BHM instruction in Rolling Oaks necessitates further review.

[35] Such as requests for professional development, resources, and instructional time.

Chapter 5: Stories of Teachers' Black History Instruction

Chapter 5 introduces the reader to the twelve K-12 practitioners who allowed me to document their accounts of teaching, learning, and living Black History in the community of Rolling Oaks in the years 2017-2019. After opting-in through the BHM survey, the participants were interviewed at a location of their choosing. Semi-structured interview protocol encouraged each participant to reflect on BHM observances as a child, their current Black History instruction, and their rationale for participation in this study (Appendix C). Beyond the semi-structured interview protocol, the discussions were open-ended and often included teachers' reflections on favorite BHM practices or fears about instructional limitations.

It is important to note that I did NOT ask the participants to describe their best and brightest BHM lessons or to share only how they engaged in reflective BHM practice or scientific research. Instead, I sought to document the teachers' experiences teaching during BHM in Rolling Oaks' schools *without intervention*. These interviews sought to review in-service teachers' practices "as they are," rather than focusing on teachers already "doing the work," as in Brown & King (2014), Landa (2012), or Swindler-Boutte & Strickland's (2008) research. The interview questions focused not only on teachers' BHM lessons or ideas, in many cases, they included how these teachers subverted, maintained, or reinforced the predominant tropes of BHM, comparing participants against the liberatory BHM framework.

The interview participants provide a representative sample of the faculty of Rolling Oaks schools. While the teacher-participants account for only 1.6% of the district's total faculty, their characteristics mirror those of the entire school district personnel, providing a salient representation for analysis. The interview participants were primarily female (83% or 10/12), and

overwhelmingly white (92% or 11/12 participants). Interviews included two male participants or 17% of interviewees, and one participant, or 8% (of the total sample) further identified as both Black and biracial. The participants represented all levels of instructional practice, with five of interview participants from Rolling Oaks' Title I elementary schools. Two participants were from Rolling Oaks' middle school buildings, and the remaining five participants were from Woodland Springs and Heartwood High Schools.

Table 5.a.[36] Interview Participants

Participant	Sex	Race	Grade /Focus	School	Title 1	Years
"Brenda Hamlin"	F	white	Kinder	"Mapleview"	Y	25+
"Dan Livingston"	M	white	Grade 2	"Mapleview"	Y	6
"Jen Evans"	F	white	Grade 3	"Cedar Grove"	Y	10
"Henry Fischer"	M	biracial	Grade 4	"Cedar Grove"	Y	5
"Lydia Clark"	F	white	Grade 5	"Forest Glen"	Y	15+
"Kayla Daniels"	F	white	7th Reading	"Redpoint"	Y	13
"Anne Sibbons"	F	white	9th Reading	"Tamarack"	Y	10
"Sam Rosman"	F	white	10-12/Lit/SS	"Heartwood"	Y	5
"Janey Taylor"	F	white	10-12/ spec ed	"Heartwood"	Y	8
"James Monure"	M	white	10-12, Literacy	"Woodland Springs"	N	19
"Gina Proctor"	F	white	10-12/ Literacy	"Woodland Springs"	N	5
"Vicki Lee"	F	white	10-12/ Sci/Bio	"Woodland Springs"	N	5

Following a review of teachers' stories of BHM instruction, each participants' instructional attainment of content, consciousness, and cultural measures of the liberatory BHM

[36] Table 5.a. includes participants' demographic data, including pseudonyms, sex, race, grade level/focus area, Title I designation (Y/N), and number of years teaching experience. To protect their anonymity, participants' names, ages, schools, and grade levels have been changed, developing quasi-composite educator profiles from which to share their stories.

instructional framework will be identified. Participants' practices will be assessed as "meeting," attaining (8-9 components), "approaching" (5-7 components), or, "not yet" exhibiting (0-4 components) liberatory BHM instructional practices (see Table 5.b.).[37] Please note, these levels of attainment seek to provide not a moral judgment of instruction, but instead, a starting place in a continuum of attainment for all practitioners, as a baseline assessment of K-12 BHM practice.

Table 5.b. Indicators of Liberatory BHM Instructional Practice A Quick Reference Guide			
Effective Black History instruction (King & Brown, 2014) **Content**	(EBH.1) Black History topics are critically assessed by students.	(EBH.2) Teaching materials and content are scientifically researched by teachers.	(EBH.3) Instructional topics and Black History discussions are relevant and seek to improve the quality of life for students.
Practiced Communicators of Black History (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017) **Consciousness**	(PCBH.1) Teachers engage in scholarly research on topics of Black History.	(PCBH.2) Teachers have confidence in their content knowledge of Black History topics.	(PCBH.3) Teachers are reflective about their Black History instruction.
Culturally Relevant Pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995) **Culture**	(CRP.1) Students experience academic success.	(CRP.2) Students develop in their cultural competencies.	(CRP.3) Students are empowered to question and challenge the status quo/ and social order.

5.1. Elementary Participants, Grades K-5

Five elementary school participants include Mrs. Hamlin (grade K) and Mr. Livingston (grade 2) from Mapleview Elementary, Mrs. Evans (grade 1) and Mr. Fischer (grade 4) from Cedar Grove Elementary, and Mrs. Clark (grade 5) from Forest Glen Elementary, all Title I schools. These

[37] Teacher interview-participants' content knowledge will be assessed through measures of "effective Black History instruction" (identified as EBH.1-3), first theorized by King & Brown, (2014). Educators' Black History consciousness is assessed through the components of practiced communicators of Black History (further PCBH. 1-3) observed by Oberg & Flanagan, 2017 in their review of the NMAAHC (2016) study of K-12 Black History instruction. Finally, teachers' inclusion of culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995), identified as CRP.1-3, are considered as components of "cultural" BHM instructional objectives, and represent the final three measures of attainment for liberatory BHM instructional practice.

elementary participants' content foci and overall comfort teaching during BHM varied greatly, as did their self-reported levels of preparedness when teaching Black History. In the sections below, each participant will narrate their experience teaching BHM alongside a summary of their measures of attainment towards liberatory BHM instruction.

Mrs. Brenda Hamlin- Kindergarten Teacher, Mapleview Elementary

Mrs. Hamlin is an impassioned kindergarten educator who identifies as a social justice advocate. She is white, with frizzy blond hair and an upbeat attitude, which is notable after more than 25 years in the kindergarten classroom. Mrs. Hamlin speaks proudly of the cultural celebrations she leads at Mapleview Elementary, including the production of an "*I Have a Dream"* video. She feels prepared for BHM instruction, although she stresses, "*only* at the kindergarten level" (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018).

Reflecting on her childhood, Mrs. Hamlin has limited memories of BHM, "I grew up in the Michael Jordan era, so our celebrities were actually almost all African American. But, I don't have a deep-rooted feel for black history" (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018). Mrs. Hamlin is inspired by biracial family members to seek out more cultural experiences, which she found challenging when she first came to Rolling Oaks. That first year, "I had all these cute little blond boys, and I was like I have no idea who is who" (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018). Now, Mrs. Hamlin celebrates the diversity of Rolling Oaks schools, reveling in the demographic shifts. While making class lists,

> I go out of my way to grab the students in poverty and students with English language issues, and sometimes special ed depending on ... Sometimes, I have to let other people have kids, too. My take is that I'd rather have the culture and I enjoy it. That's me. (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018)

“Culture” is also a significant component of Mrs. Hamlin’s kindergarten instruction. She says she goes out of her way to integrate diverse figures throughout the school year, not only in February.

> If there's an inventor that may be of a different culture, regardless of what culture it is, I try to bring that in. But, I don't think it's in our [district] curriculum. I don't even think Dr. King is in our curriculum. We may have the day off, but there's no big party. It's just a day off. I'm not very impressed with it. (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018)

Finding that the district-provided curriculum does not provide support for Black History instruction, Mrs. Hamlin develops BHM materials for her kindergarten students and shares with colleagues. She primarily teaches BHM through stories of Black heroes’ triumphs and says it is as a method of showcasing the behaviors she’d like her kindergarteners to embody. While she takes the job seriously, she delights in making the learning playful,

> We sing songs. It's a big deal. It's interesting [to think about] how I've taught it over the years. I remember when I first taught [during Black History Month], we had two drinking fountains, and only people with white socks could drink at this fountain. It was about segregation. I think over the years; I've changed it to be more about standing up for what's right, even if it's not fair. (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018)

While Mrs. Hamlin focuses some BHM instruction on inventor Garrett Morgan and Ruby Bridges, teaching students about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is her favorite.

> My big thing with Dr. King is he's like “forget this, this is a silly law. . . we are changing this,” and he made a difference. The kindergartners, they need that acceptance lesson. It's like “let's stick up for what's right, even if it may not be the rule that anybody wants.” (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018)

This year, Mrs. Hamlin's students created a video sharing their dreams for a better world, as inspired by Dr. King's famous *"I Have a Dream"* speech. The video included students' pledging to be kind,[38] while proudly standing in front of an American flag. Mrs. Hamlin shared the video with colleagues across the district, hoping to assist in their learning. Mrs. Hamlin says that while some of her kindergarten colleagues find it difficult to discuss Black History with kindergarteners, she loves it. "Actually, it's kind of fun" (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018). She reports that students experience positive outcomes, and she sees transfer after teaching students to stand up for what's right. In general, Mrs. Hamlin says her BHM lessons are relatively simple because she believes kindergarteners really, "don't see color,"[39](Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018) and have not been privy to racialized differences "unless modeled by their parents" (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018). Most importantly, Mrs. Hamlin says that lessons of acceptance and dreaming big dreams are essential components in kindergarteners' understanding of the world.

Although interested in Black History, engaged in her instruction, and committed to sharing resources with colleagues across the district, Mrs. Hamlin's BHM instruction is considered "not yet" liberating in nature. Though she has a dynamic personality and is a caring practitioner, Mrs. Hamlin's BHM instruction essentializes Black History as rooted in stories of uplift and achievement. Her BHM instruction promotes and disseminates neoliberal ideologies, such as color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) both in her expectations and beliefs, and further, in the instructional content she creates and shares.

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[38] Students' responses included "being kind to poisonous snakes," "telling people I like the way they look," and most often "I will be kind by sharing toys," or "kind words."

[39] Mrs. Hamlin's assertion of her students colorblindness means no harm, but inadvertently reinforces stereotypes and "boot-straps" ideologies that reference meritocracy as the ultimate testing ground for success. Such unintentional negation of difference can lead to inequitable representations of history, and ultimately, color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Mrs. Hamlin's BHM instruction garners two of the components of liberatory BHM instruction, as she engages students in BHM projects, which allow them to experience academic success (CRP.1).[40] She further provides and produces BHM content intending to improve the quality of life for students (EBH.3). Despite these positive measures of intent, Mrs. Hamlin's BHM instruction, albeit well-meaning, presents ideologies that hinder her students' experiences of liberatory Black History instruction in the present.

Mr. Dan Livingston- 2nd Grade Teacher, Mapleview Elementary

Mr. Livingston is now in his fifth year teaching second grade. He is white, not quite middle-aged, and never without a smile. Despite coming to the classroom later in life, Mr. Livingston says he considers teaching "semi-retirement," (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018) and is thrilled to have left the corporate world for his 8-9-year-old "clients." Of teaching, he says, "it's really easy for me. I don't carry a lot of stress" (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018). Since taking on the second grade, he's focused on building relationships with students of all backgrounds through high expectations for academic excellence. "It doesn't really matter where they're from, what their background is, or what their ethnicity is" (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018). He asserts, "If you build a relationship, good things will follow" (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018).

Reflecting on his own experiences in school, Mr. Livingston has no recollection of Black History either in elementary or high school. "I don't explicitly remember teachers talking about Black History" (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018). He says at most he thinks he had Martin Luther King Jr. Day off when he was in college.

[40] This notation refers to components of liberatory practice, as outlined in Table 3.a, Chapter 3

These days, when Mr. Livingston talks about his BHM instruction, he says he's "not at all" (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018) prepared. He reports that there are challenges in terms of time and access, and BHM instruction, "It's just one more thing on the plate that gets pushed off to the side" (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018). He acknowledges that the responsibility to improve access to Black History is partially on the teachers, "Yeah. You know, I think we could probably do a better job of [teaching Black History] at the grade schools" (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018). Despite this acknowledgement, Mr. Livingston feels it's necessary to stick to the provided curriculum, even if Black History is missing from its ranks. It's not apathy, he says, but,

> If you don't have the unit within your Social Studies curriculum, it's not getting done. The only time we touch [Black] history is in our immigration unit. . . We do talk about slavery as part of immigration, but we don't have any [curricular] pieces around it. (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018)

Between the lack of social studies content support and the significant number of subjects he's required to teach (including math, science, social studies, reading, writing, and word work), time and access to Black History content are barriers that inhibit Mr. Livingston's instruction. He suggests,

> We should be able to have that 360-degree view of all the events in history. That is how you look at any problem in business. That is how we should look at history. Not an arbitrary path of when the white people came until today. If you want an honest view of history, you look at large points of history on the timeline and ask what are the viewpoints of the different people that were the stakeholders at that time. (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018)

While Mr. Livingston uses his business experience to envision improved BHM instruction, he says that in Rolling Oaks, it is not just social studies content that requires review, but the entirety of the curriculum. “There should be more systematic integration of [Black History]” (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018). When it comes to this integration, Mr. Livingston has concerns that without systemic support, changing the “required” curriculum would limit equitable access in the schools of Rolling Oaks. He hesitates to make change in his classroom or curriculum, as BHM

> should be equitable in its access to resources. Because you don't want to create a perception in the community that *this* school cares less about Black History than *that* school does. But, I think if somebody really stepped up to organize something [for BHM], I think people would be open to it in our school. (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018)

Mr. Livingston’s concerns for time, equitable access, and inspired colleagues who will promote BHM results in his own lack of action, creating a barrier towards liberatory BHM instruction I’ll refer to as “waiting for Superman.”[41] While he waits for others (district or colleagues) to improve BHM instruction, he fails to make changes to his instruction that would benefit students’ experience of BHM.

Mr. Livingston recognizes these challenges and imagines a future where Black History instruction is part of the mainstream curriculum. Until then, he says, “I think my biggest message and I want to relay it to you here is that I think I have done a poor job of integrating it” (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018). Despite best intentions, Mr. Livingston’s BHM instruction lacks the content, consciousness, and cultural components of liberatory BHM instruction, “not yet” exhibiting components of liberatory praxis.

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[41] “Waiting for Superman” alludes to the idea of waiting for somebody to save the day in terms of BHM instruction.

Mrs. Jennifer Evans - 3rd Grade Teacher, Cedar Grove Elementary

Across town at Cedar Grove Elementary, third-grade teacher Mrs. Evans says that unlike Mr. Livingston, she was a reluctant educator. “When I was a kid, I was like, ‘I don't want to be a nurse or a teacher.’ [There was] no reason, I just didn't” (Mrs. Evans, interview, 2017). Now Mrs. Evans smiles proudly, admitting, “It’s my 10th year, which is creepy. All here, in this classroom” (Mrs. Evans, interview, 2017). Before she began teaching at Cedar Grove, Mrs. Evans recalls experiencing BHM as a suburban elementary student in the late 1990s. “We just did the standard Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Jackie Robinson. Some years I don't think we did, but I know we learned about it” (Mrs. Evans, interview, 2017).

Now, Mrs. Evans looks forward to yearly BHM assemblies as a method of encouraging families’ participation in their child’s learning. In February last year, Mrs. Evans hosted a BHM assembly for third-grade parents and community members, recalling, “It was pretty fun, but I think we talked basically about the core, like Dr. King and Jackie Robinson” (Mrs. Evans, interview, 2017). Her students’ performance included songs about Martin Luther King Jr., a staged re-enactment of Rosa Parks refusing to leave the bus, and speeches about famous figures like Jackie Robinson.

Mrs. Evans reported the performance was well-received, as parents and students seemed to enjoy it. Despite the success, she confesses, “I feel rather awkward as a white teacher teaching black history to black students” (Mrs. Evans, interview, 2017). Even in awkwardness, Mrs. Evans carries on, hoping her students will take something valuable from the people they learn about each year. While Mrs. Evans’ BHM instruction primarily focuses on “learning about African American adults that are role models” (Mrs. Evans, interview, 2017). she believes the instruction “is beneficial because I'm not saying it's just African American kids, but a lot of [the

students] have not the greatest role models, so seeing that they can do something good with their lives is good too" (Mrs. Evans, interview, 2017).

Mrs. Evans hopes events like the BHM assembly will positively influence students' futures, while simultaneously inspiring those in the audience. She wants to encourage students' families' engagement with the school system, because, she asserts, "Until the parents are on board, it's only going to do so much" (Mrs. Evans, interview, 2017).

While Mrs. Evans' commitment to BHM instruction is commendable, her narrow focus on the Black heroes she learned about as a child essentializes Black History to stories of uplift and exceptionalism. Simultaneously, these Black role-models are presented as mediation for students and families, suggesting an internalized negative valuation of students' experiences outside of school. While Mrs. Evans reflects on her Black History practice, she fails to make changes to her instruction. Mrs. Evans provides instruction she *believes* will improve her students' lives, (working towards liberatory measure EBH.3), but fails to attain it, as her instruction is for uplift and remediation rather than liberation.

Mrs. Evans' hyper-focus on parent involvement and her accompanying deficit-based projections of student role models undermines the attempts she makes towards liberatory BHM instruction. As Mrs. Evans draws on the saviors and heroes mentality King and Woodson (2017) warned of (demonstrating essentialized BHM narratives), her students perform during Black History Month as a method of cultural revision. Mrs. Evans, despite her idealism, implicitly encourages her Black students to become something other than what they are, suggesting that "role model qualities" are outside the students' and families' current identity. For these reasons, Mrs. Evans' instruction is "not yet" liberatory in nature.

Mr. Henry Fischer- 4th Grade Teacher, Cedar Grove Elementary

Just upstairs from Mrs. Evans' classroom at Cedar Grove Elementary, Mr. Fischer, a self-described "history buff," teaches fourth-grade. He says, "It's the best job I've ever had, and I don't want to do anything else" (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2018). The job meets many of his interests; he can explore a passion for history while highlighting multiple cultural perspectives across the school year, not just during BHM. He acknowledges his instruction might offer a unique point of view, saying, "I've thought about this kind of stuff a lot, 'cause I've had to. And, I might be able to offer a perspective that other people might not" (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2018).

Reflecting on his fourth-grade students' BHM knowledge, he says,

> From what I can [tell], we don't do a very good job of teaching history, anyone's history. They seem like they got heads full of straw when it comes to anything historical. So, the first thing that jumps out to me is that; we're not teaching them anything. Perhaps, we're emphasizing the rudiments of reading to the exclusion of other important information. If they're going to understand themselves, and one another, they need to have a historical perspective. We're not giving them that at all. If we're deficient in Black History, it might be because we're deficient in history in general. (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2018)

Taking his childhood experience of BHM into consideration, Mr. Fischer makes sure that his instruction does not replicate the harm the observance caused him as a child.

> My first recollection of Black History Month was watching a program in the first grade, feeling horrible. They showed a series of still photos in the TV presentation that we saw of impoverished looking black people, and I noticed that one of them really looked like me. I felt really bad for that kid, and I also felt bad for myself, 'cause I'm not sure if

> anyone told me that there's a thing called racism yet. I think that might have been one of my first ten experiences of the concept. (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2018)

Mr. Fischer juxtaposes this experience with a positive BHM later on in elementary, “In the fourth grade, I had an African American teacher who tried to ‘observe’ Black History Month, but it was more like Black History Season, 'cause it just never ended” (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2018). Now Mr. Fischer tries to replicate that teachers’ inclusive BHM instruction.

Mr. Fischer’s interview balanced his reflections between commentary on students’ historical awareness, and the systemic racism he sees in schools. He spoke about Black History, about students’ educational and community access, and the inequities he believes are perpetuated by Eurocentric education and systematic disenfranchisement.

During BHM 2017, Mr. Fischer’s students engaged in debates about the reasonableness of Colin Kaepernick’s take-a-knee protest. He invited students to read about both sides of the issue, using primary-source materials to find evidence supporting their arguments for or against the reasonableness. The students then drafted opinion essays and presented their perspectives to the class. This multi-day lesson was only one of the Black History focused lessons facilitated by Mr. Fischer during BHM.

For Mr. Fischer, it is not just about Black History as a necessary component for liberation, but it is about broadening the conversation and making it relevant to his students. He says, “In whatever I do, I want to acknowledge that the world is full of interesting people” (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2018). He believes students

> need to know what the scope and shape of their world is. So, I think that I would teach that way if I just had white kids in my room. I would teach that way if I had any single flavor of humanity in my room, because it's their world. That I have a diverse room, gives

> me all the more reason to talk about Haiti, and then Bangladesh or wherever. I wanna tell them about stuff they need to know about, and inequities. The case of Haiti is one of the things that I need to teach them about. For the current social studies class, called Trip Around The World, we had 100 Starbursts and we divided them up in the way that resources are shared in the actual world. And, I taught them that the top 30% of wealth earners have 97% of the wealth. So, 70% of the people have 3%. So, I'm looking at two Starbursts, and I said, "Okay, you 18 people, we gotta cut these up." And then, the one kid [was] with a bag of like 50. They were like, "That's not fair." But that's the world we have right now, they need to know about it as early as we can teach them. And, Starburst sets a pretty powerful- pedagogical tool. (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2018)

Mr. Fischer engages his students in ongoing conversations about the impact of systemic inequities around the world while acknowledging the diverse backgrounds of the students he teaches. He encourages the students to interact with Black History instruction (EBH.3), and to develop and challenge their perspectives, presenting BHM as relevant to their lives (CRP.3). Based on these measures, Mr. Fischer achieves eight of the nine components of liberatory BHM practice, and his instruction is considered “meeting” liberatory BHM standards. Mr. Fischer attained the content (EBH.1-3), and cultural (CRP.1-3) components of liberatory BHM instruction; and he engages in scholarly research on BHM topics, and was reflective in his practice, meeting two of three “consciousness” objectives.

The only measure Mr. Fischer did not attain towards liberatory BHM instruction was PCBH.2, relating to his instructional confidence when teaching Black History. In the preliminary survey, Mr. Fischer rated himself as only “partially” prepared for BHM instruction. Mr. Fischer’s discomfort in BHM instruction will be explored in the discussion of the study found in

Chapter 7, section 7.2. His discomfort presents a barrier towards BHM instruction that deserves further review.

Mrs. Lydia Clark- 5th Grade Teacher, Forest Glen Elementary

Mrs. Lydia Clark is a fifth-grade teacher at Forest Glen Elementary. She is white, blond, tattooed, and shockingly direct. She worked in the community of Rolling Oaks for more than 15 years, all of them at Forest Glen Elementary. Before moving to Rolling Oaks, Mrs. Clark taught in urban communities in the southwest and the Milwaukee Public Schools; where the experience caused her to recognize the generational impacts of poverty and access.

Mrs. Clark recalls her experience growing up in a sheltered community "where there were no African American, Hispanic, or Asians. We were just white farm kids" (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018). In her recollection, she was taught "American History" and says they "never covered the civil rights movement. I don't ever really [remember] learning about slavery besides like, 'Slavery happened'" (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018). Overall, she says her community was behind in their understanding of Black History, saying,

> It's so embarrassing for my town, but I'll put it out there anyway. When my sister was in high school, they would have slave auctions. But my sister's year they had an African American family move in. All of the sudden it struck them that this was probably not a good idea, and it stopped. They stopped having it. People were upset [saying things like], "It was like, all in fun." "What's the big deal? It's not like they're black kids. They're white kids." (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018)

"[I thought] Are you nuts? But that happened" (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018). The relative absence of (and ignorance towards) Black History in her childhood experience inspired Mrs. Clark's later research at the University of Wisconsin. "That brought me into African American

studies" (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018). At the university, Mrs. Clark received an African American studies minor, furthering her confidence and passion for Black History. She now includes Black historical content throughout the year.

When we met in mid-February 2018, Mrs. Clark's classroom was full of BHM artifacts. She sat in a students' desk opposite me, gesturing to the timeline that ringed the backside of her classroom. Mrs. Clark explains that the timeline has been essential in developing fifth-graders' understanding. The dates were representative of learning intentions for a civil rights unit she and her colleagues created as a collaborative venture into reading and social studies content for grade five. She said,

> We've been working on an overview. I always want to start with slavery and the Civil War, and that, but it's hard with fifth graders cause time is just not a function of their brain. It's just not there developmentally yet. In the past, [I've had students] like, "Was Rosa Parks a slave?" [so I tell them] "Okay, let's go back to the timeline because there's like 100 years in between [slavery and civil rights] which tells you. (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018)

Mrs. Clark continues excitedly talking about her fifth-grade civil rights reading and writing unit, which she has been perfecting for the last four years. Though it began as a content-focused research report, Mrs. Clark has taken her instruction far past the provided curriculum and offers gratitude for curricular materials that allow her to engage in discussions of Black History with colleagues and students alike. She says,

> I don't think we would be having these conversations if it wasn't for our Reading and Writing Workshop units, and all of the sudden civil rights was one of them. Because

> [before that] I think February was just like, "Oh, it is Black History Month, so if you want to throw in a Martin Luther King video feel free." (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018).

Now, Mrs. Clark utilizes her Black History timeline and her students' companion civil rights research as a touchstone for both students and adults at Forest Glen Elementary. She shakes her head as she shares that challenges of decontextualized history and developmental understanding are not the students' alone. She says she finds herself having to explain the relevance of BHM to adults.

> [At Forest Glen] a lot of people say, "Well, why do we have to have Black History Month?" [So I say] "History the way we teach it is white history. [Black History Month is] about African American history, about migrations of African peoples." (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018).

Mrs. Clark acknowledges that beyond this unit, her African American History minor helps her to feel prepared when difficult topics come up for discussion during BHM. In terms of student and adult questions, she says, "I never had a topic brought up that I would have said no to...It's always just been a passion of mine, so I've always been like, 'Yay!'" (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018).

Despite this excitement, Mrs. Clark's BHM instruction does not just cover the "feel good" stories of Black History. Instead, Mrs. Clark includes discussions of systemic issues such as redlining, and economic access (even within the community of Rolling Oaks), beginning with the advent of enslavement in the United States through Black Lives Matter, and BHM observances today (exhibiting EBH.1). In sharing these histories, she makes sure to include narratives of resistance, artistry, and the ingenuity of Black cultures within and beyond the United States. For example, she says,

> When we do slavery, [we talk about how] they fought back. They broke their hoes. They undermined them. They sang these gospel songs. They were smart in manipulating the system, and figuring at how to get around it. [I tell my students,] this cleverness is in your culture. (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018)

Mrs. Clark does not rely on curriculum alone to engage students in learning about Black History. Beyond the focus on Black resistance, Mrs. Clark recognizes music as a central component in her students' histories, and invites her class to explore Black History through explorations of popular music during BHM.

> I think the music is the one thing I'm proud of, 'cause you can start with the spirituals of slavery. You can do all the generations of music, the popular musicians, how they influenced all other genres. Then kids, [get] that pride feeling of, "Oh, yeah." Yeah, "That's in my house. My mom listens to that old stuff that you're talking about." "Oh, I know RUN-DMC." Just bringing it up through the years, because everyone listens to music. (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018)

Through these examples of Mrs. Clarks' evolving Black History instruction, content becomes accessible and relevant to students' lives by providing multiple points of entry and analysis. Mrs. Clark's inclusive instruction (developed on top of the district-provided curriculum) and community collaborations enable students (of any background) to share connections to the people, songs, and texts they love. Mrs. Clark uses her civil rights unit as an impetus for engaging students in multiple aspects of Black History research in the past and present. Mrs. Clark's BHM observances include all nine components of liberatory BHM practice, including content, consciousness, and cultural objectives, thereby offering a model of elementary school BHM instruction that "meets" liberatory BHM objectives.

5.2 Middle School Participants, Grades 6-9

Two middle school participants engaged in interviews. Both women were experienced teachers who taught in urban and suburban settings before teaching in Rolling Oaks. Both used some form of critical literacy in their BHM instruction and spoke about the importance of including multiple perspectives of BHM that are relevant to students' lives.

Mrs. Kayla Daniels- 7th Grade Teacher, Redpointe Middle School

Mrs. Daniels is in her fifteenth year in Rolling Oaks and has taught at both elementary and middle school levels, in regular and special education. A white teacher, she says her race is always at the forefront of her mind. That is one of the reasons she loves teaching seventh-grade literacy; she can include social studies & cultural consciousness in everything she teaches, and says the kids are "ready for it" (Mrs. Daniels, interview, 2019).

Mrs. Daniels does not recall any celebration or acknowledgment of Black History or BHM in Rolling Oaks during her early years in the district. She similarly has no recollection of learning about Black History as a child. "Nope, nothing. I don't remember any specific units or anything like that" (Mrs. Daniels, interview, 2019), she says, "I did take an African Studies class in high school and then in college, but [they were] specifically about Africa. It was not any Black History in our country. It was African world history" (Mrs. Daniels, interview, 2019).

In 2019, during a second-semester project that coincided with BHM, Mrs. Daniels invited her seventh-grade scholars to take a critical view of Black History by engaging in independent research projects on people, events, and movements in Black History. Mrs. Daniels hoped this research project would challenge students' "traditional" ideas about BHM, which she considered to be encompassed by a white perspective. She said,

> I want kids to explore it themselves, you know what I mean? Black History Month has the words "black history", but what does that mean *to them*? I want them to be able to find out what they are interested in learning about our country's history. (Mrs. Daniels, interview, 2019)

The resulting people, movements, and events in Black History her students chose highlighted a variety of Black History topics, from Bob Marley's musical stylings and the Children's Crusade to the advent of the Black Lives Matter Movement. Mrs. Daniels reflected on the project, comparing it to her prior experiences teaching during BHM. She said,

> I think a lot of people focus on the people that stand out in black history. I know in our school we have some posters that people put up that are descriptions of black athletes and I think that's where a lot of people start. (Mrs. Daniels, interview, 2019)

It's more than posters and bulletin boards that inform BHM instruction for Mrs. Daniels. As she began this year's research project with her seventh graders, she was surprised to see their engagement.

> When I would send home reminders of homework when they were behind on their notes or their project work, a couple of families responded, "They're really interested in this topic. Thank you for pushing them." In one example, "It was an African-American student [who was] motivated by [the project] at home. Even though [the student] was behind on their work, they were fine with working on it. (Mrs. Daniels, interview, 2019)

Talking with Mrs. Daniels' student Tayshon in another interview, he fondly recalled this BHM project from her class, telling me all about his research. . .

> *"I did Bob Marley. I learned that he, um, got shot for no reason. He made music not just for fame. He made it for people that would listen to music. Like when he was young, he*

> *would like to hang out with his friends and his mom would be like, don't do that. And then once he got older he got really focused into it. Then he was amazing. He made good music. I read the story and I studied at home. Yeah, I also watched the documentary Who Shot the Sheriff on Netflix.*[42] *It was beautiful." (Tayshon, interview, 2019)*

This student-selected project utilized a Padlet (see Appendix B.2) of "Leaders in Black History,"[43] as a starting place for in-depth conversations with both students and families about their experiences in the past and present day. Mrs. Daniels created a rubric for the project, allowing students to select their area of focus while highlighting multiple perspectives of the Black experience. If students didn't find what they were looking for in this resource, Mrs. Daniels allowed students to propose their own topics, expanding her list of subject matter.

> So, for example, I didn't have the Chicago Ride of 1919. Somebody wanted to do that, and the Freedom Songs, sit-ins. And then, oh, somebody wanted to do African-American cowboys, African-Americans in theater. There were some cool ones that the kids came up with. (Mrs. Daniels, interview, 2019)

Mrs. Daniels' encouragement of students' interests (EBH.3) and critical assessment of Black History topics (EBH.1) developed students' content knowledge and established a purpose for their BHM research. This unit design garnered two of three "content" objectives towards effective Black History instruction, and one of the "consciousness" objectives, as Mrs. Daniels' reflection upon prior practice and revision of BHM instruction gave inspiration for this unit of study. Mrs. Daniels' instruction met all of the "cultural" objectives, as her students experienced academic success (CRP.1), developed in their cultural competencies, and were empowered to

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[42] *Remastered, Who Shot the Sheriff,* (2018) Kief Davidson, director. Netflix

[43] This Padlet was built by the researcher for dissemination with colleagues in 2018 it was shared districtwide as a resource for BHM instruction. If you would like to visit the padlet, see Appendix B.2 for access.

challenge the status quo (CRP.3). Mrs. Daniels did not engage in scientific research on Black History before the unit, failing to meet one of the content and two consciousness objectives towards liberatory BHM instruction. This designation aligns with Mrs. Daniels' self-assessment of BHM preparedness, where she considered herself "somewhat" prepared for BHM instruction. Overall, Mrs. Daniels' instruction attained six of the nine components of liberatory BHM practice, "approaching" liberatory BHM instruction.

Mrs. Gina Proctor- 9th Grade Teacher, Tamarack Middle School

Like Mrs. Daniels, Mrs. Proctor is a middle school literacy teacher. She is white, in her mid-30s, and is an outspoken advisor for minority (people of color and LGBTQ) student groups. An advocate to the core, at times, she worries that her outspoken manner may get her in trouble. "I've had to ask. Did I just get in trouble for this?" (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019). Regardless of any "trouble" she fears making, Mrs. Proctor is an equity leader in the Rolling Oaks Schools. She is both a school equity team member and co-facilitator of professional development on culturally responsive practices at the district level.

Growing up in Wisconsin, Mrs. Proctor refers to her schooling experience as in "the bubble" (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019). She attended a private elementary school where she felt sheltered from the outside world, "I did not realize what was going on in other places" -- "the racism and homophobia and sexism, the anti-abortion, all of that stuff" (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019). She similarly recalls little about BHM growing up, saying, "I remember just learning the *I Have a Dream speech* in elementary school" (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019).

Now in her own classroom, Mrs. Proctor remains pragmatic about BHM instruction. In 2018, she included Black History read alouds in her honors lit classes, but acknowledged that

fear of opposition caused her to limit a Black History focus. She says it's difficult to pull in too much during BHM

> that is out of the norm, or not in the English curriculum, [because] people are going to be like, why do we have to do that? Why do we have to have Black History Month? What about white history month? . . .And it could just be because of my experiences, like so much pushback every year on stuff like that. Maybe I'm a little jaded in the sense that my idea of black history in this district is just wincing. . . just waiting for that pushback, waiting for that mollification from the district office. [This year] I'm just going on to have this [instruction] cause the least amount of ripples. (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019)

Though fearful of raising families' ire, Mrs. Proctor read *"The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a Young Civil Rights Activist"* (Levison, 2017) with her honors English class. She recalls that both she and her students were surprised they'd not heard about Audrey Faye Hendricks before.

> I was like," how did I just learn this?" Holy buckets. This kid was in jail for a week, and her family was cool with it because they knew it was working towards progress. They sent their eight-year-old, I can't imagine as parents how they would have ... that would have been so hard for them. (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019).

Though she'd initially selected the text as an example of author's craft, the resulting lesson evolved into a critical discussion of the young Miss. Hendrick's experience. Mrs. Proctor and her students considered Audrey's march from multiple stakeholders' perspectives, questioned the text, and then one another, exploring what Ciardiello (2004) describes as critical literacy. "Critical literacy is defined as a set of literacy practices and civic competencies that help the learner develop a critical awareness that texts represent particular points of view while often

silencing other views" (Luke & Freebody, 1997 in Ciardiello, 2004). Critical literacy practices lead to the interrogation of social justice issues (Ciardiello, 2004), such as in Mrs. Proctor's case, include hidden histories, and questions of access, race, and systemic inequities. Mrs. Proctor's use of an unassuming picture book provided the necessary fodder for deep conversation that might otherwise have been balked at by her students. Mrs. Proctor says this critical discussion far extends beyond BHM.

> That's a lot of what I try to do when we talk in class, is to teach kids how to be critical thinkers around issues. [I tell them] you can't just take your parents' word, and don't take my word either. Do your own thinking, and do your own processing. Because there's no ...easy [way to teach Black History, we can't just say]... "here read the *I Have a Dream* speech. Isn't that cool?," That'd be great, wouldn't it? We can't do that, because there are eight voices saying that's naïve and ridiculous and it'll never happen. (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019)

These dissenting voices have had a lasting impact on Mrs. Proctor. She says the "voices" come from parents *and* students who question both her content and intent. "Last year was the first year I had some real pushback" (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019). The pushback resulted from community response from a social justice summit she and her colleagues began in efforts to center students' voices and multiple identities. This yearly summit creates a space for students' appraisal of difficult topics, including Black History, and proves to be an event that is very personal, to both students and teachers. "All our hearts and our identities are all tied to it" (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019). In the years since its inception, the social justice summit has caused ripples in the Rolling Oaks' community, causing Mrs. Proctor to proceed with caution;

> I feel like a lot of the work that I try to do in this district, I'm constantly like a salmon swimming upstream against the current, and while I think that the [district's] work this year for Black History Month was obviously far and away more than what has been done in the past. The only reason in my opinion, that this started, was because when we brought [the director of the local Boys and Girls Club] last year for our social justice summit, he called [the lack of BHM instruction] out.[44] (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019).

Mrs. Proctor's social justice focus has had a significant impact on BHM instruction in Rolling Oaks. It wasn't until after Tamarack Middle School's social justice summit in late 2017, that Rolling Oaks school district first took notice of students' requests for more Black History instruction. After the event was publicized, the schools began making changes to encourage each K-12 teacher to participate in BHM observances. At the middle school, these new BHM initiatives resulted in mixed messages. Mrs. Proctor experienced these firsthand, contacting me later to share her reflection. She said that in 2019,"BHM wasn't something we were doing as a community, it was something that was being done to us. Every time it was brought up, it was more like 'shape up or ship out' rather than a celebration" (Mrs. Proctor, personal communication, 2019).

A district leader recognized for her contributions to social justice education and students' rights in her school, Mrs. Proctor's impact through organization, advocacy and facilitation of student groups and middle school events garner her all three of "cultural" components of the liberatory BHM instruction (CRP.1-3).

[44] During the social justice summit in 2017, students suggested to the director of the Boys and Girls club that there was no Black History Month celebration, and that their experience was very limited. He responded by posting this comment to facebook, and a local news station picked up the story. In response, the district requested each school participate in a BHM celebration.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Proctor's hesitation to engage in Black History and BHM instruction *in class* limits her "content" and "consciousness" attainment towards liberatory BHM instruction. Showcasing one measure of effective Black History instruction (King & Brown, 2014), Mrs. Proctor's critical discussions of literature, and outside leadership in student groups both seek to promote improved quality of life for her students (EBH.3). In total, Mrs. Proctor's BHM instruction was assessed as meeting four of the nine components of liberatory BHM instruction, "approaching" liberatory BHM practices. The fear of pushback from all stakeholders provides a barrier towards Mrs. Proctor's liberatory BHM instruction. Despite this limitation, Mrs. Proctor's commitment to social justice education and leadership for minority student groups has had a significant impact on the districtwide implementation of Black History. From the 2017 social justice summit students' requests, to a recent Black student protest,[45] her students have been at the forefront of social activism in Rolling Oaks.

5.3 High School Participants, Grades 10-12

Five high school teachers participated in interviews; two from Heartwood High School, the alternative high school, and three from Woodland Springs, high school campus. All five participants' BHM instruction included student interests and voice. All of the high school teachers cited relational trust as a critical component of teaching Black History while white.

Ms. Janey Taylor, 10-12th Grade Special Education, Heartwood High School

Ms. Janey is a white-presenting teacher in her 30s.[46] Though her last name is Taylor, she prefers that the kids call her Ms. Janey, which they do, frequently, coming in and out of her

[45] See Afterward for more.

[46] Ms. Janey did not answer questions about her race, stating that as a child she called herself purple. During our interview, she referenced her father's inability to accept friends of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. She is identified as "white" in the construct of this study, and I have suggested her as "white presenting" due to these circumstances.

office to visit, high-fiving and giving hugs. She is soft-spoken, but she takes no "stuff" from students or adults of any age. Originally from Wisconsin, she says that in her neighborhood growing up,

> the minority were white people and the majority was black. And then it was Laotian, Hmong, Hispanic. Somebody [recently said to me], 'well teaching in [Heartwood] you seem like you fit . . I'm like this is how I grew up. (Mrs. Janey, interview, 2018)

Now in her fifth year at Heartwood High School, Ms. Janey provides specialized instruction in an inclusion setting, teaching all subjects to a small number of students each day. In terms of BHM, Ms. Janey recalls learning little as a child, "we talked about Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. I don't remember it ever being much more than that" (Mrs. Janey, interview, 2018). It was all essentialized figures during BHM until high school, and she thinks it's much the same for her students, as she reports,

> They know Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King Jr. And that's it. I kid you not. They don't know what civil rights are, so we taught a civil rights class. It's bare minimum. And sometimes I think there's no way all these kids, all were skipping on the same day when this [Black History] unit was taught or anything like that. So it really makes me think there's a lot that's lacking. (Mrs. Janey, interview, 2018)

Though students' needs drive Ms. Janey's instruction, the project-based nature of Heartwood High School allows her to create classroom content based on students' interests. She recalls,

> Last semester, the kids got to learn about civil rights. We talked about what civil rights are. And then we talked about history from reconstruction and how civil rights weren't there for everybody. [The kids] didn't even know what Jim Crow laws were. Even though I knew that stuff, and I told you, I didn't even really like history. We went through who

> could vote, who couldn't. We went through a lot of slave trade, slavery, and just how did they feel? [I asked,] What would they feel like in that era? Did they think it was fair? What would they do? It was a lot of articles, discussions, why did they think it was that way. One day I really challenged them and I said, how do you think this [type of inequity] could be broken down in Rolling Oaks? (Mrs. Janey, interview, 2018).

Ms. Janey asserts that all BHM instruction (and high school curricula in general) has to be about the kids. She says the instruction needs to focus on the inequities and systems that impact their daily lives so that they can learn to address them (CRP.2, CRP.1). Ms. Janey finds that in Rolling Oaks, the kids notice these issues, but don't have the historical background to understand it; "The kids will tell me if you're sagging your pants and you're black they're gonna pull over even if you're walking. So, I definitely think [BHM instruction] needs to go deeper" (Mrs. Janey, interview, 2018).

Ms. Janey explores these needs, and focuses on issues that are impacting students in the present tense (EBH.3). She draws on expertise from the local community, inviting speakers to Heartwood so her students can get a wider perspective.

> We [taught] a social justice program after summer school just to give the kids more credit and structure so they weren't having idle time to do things that could get them in trouble. We brought in a whole bunch of speakers just telling them about different opportunities. (Mrs. Janey, interview, 2018)

Bringing multiple voices into the classroom is essential in Ms. Janey's practice. She connects with the local college, fire station, and a boxing ring. She hosts basketball events after school and invites families into her classroom. Ms. Janey recognizes that despite her whiteness, her relationships with students are privileged, because she has the time to spend one on one with

students, getting to know them as individuals. She imagines it is more difficult for teachers with less access and experience, acknowledging,

> there's not much diversity in the staff in Rolling Oaks. With that I don't think everyone really gets how it is growing up. And I also don't think that they realize that kids don't always identify as easily with people that don't look like them because they assume their life isn't the same. (Mrs. Janey, interview, 2018)

Ms. Janey says there is “no way” she is prepared for BHM instruction, though the thoughtful reflection she exhibits in her instructional planning and relational capacity with students appears otherwise. Her instruction is focused on her students’ needs and interests in the current moment, exhibiting both EBH.1 & EBH.3. Ms. Janey’s Black History instruction is actionable and invites her students to examine multiple perspectives while connecting to (and challenging) the community around them. In the examples she provided, Ms. Janey’s instruction exhibits the “cultural” components of liberatory BHM instruction, as students experience academic success (CRP.1), develop in their cultural competencies (CRP.2) and routinely challenge and question the status quo (CRP.3). In all, Ms. Janey’s reflective practice, iterations of BHM instruction (PCBH.3), and continual focus on students’ interests garner six of nine measures of liberatory BHM instruction. Ms. Janey's is a practitioner “approaching” liberatory BHM instruction.

Mrs. Sam Rosman- 10-12th Grade Literacy, Heartwood High School

Mrs. Rosman is white, in her 30s, and has a natural smile. Her classroom is just down the hall from Ms. Janey’s at Heartwood high school, and it has brightly painted walls, and all the qualities of a living room, with a few added desks. It is a comfortable space full of students’ artwork, writing, and books. Now in her third year at Heartwood, Mrs. Rosman says it has been an adjustment leaving the “sea of white kids" (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018), at Woodland

Springs High School (67% white kids)(DPI, 2019) for Rolling Oaks' alternative, project-based high school, and majority students of color (62% students of color)(DPI 2019).

These demographics are not all new to Mrs. Rosman, who grew up in a progressive town like Madison. Raised by "progressive" parents, she describes her experience as a student of the 1980s, learning about Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King during BHM, but recalls little beyond that (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018). At home, Mrs. Rosman remembers having open conversations about difficult topics with her mother (a teacher) at a very young age. She had an awareness of social injustice in childhood, and fears that even now, she can speak the language of social justice, but is unsure she is "walking the walk" (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018). For these reasons, she considers herself "not prepared" for BHM instruction.

This lack of preparedness is a challenge of "whiteness" in Mrs. Rosman's estimation, "Just knowing that I've grown up as a white person with deeply embedded racist beliefs. I have to stay very conscious" (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018). While acknowledging this potential limitation, Mrs. Rosman feels honored that her students respond to her as a member of the community, joking that they consider her about "about 30% Black" (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018).

Though Mrs. Rosman primarily teaches literacy, her class content is developed based on students' interests. She recalls, "We had a workshop here in the fall that was essentially Black History. Students were talking to me about how they didn't like it, because it's a white teacher telling them about Black History. And that makes total sense" (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018). She wishes there was another option, but recognizes the demographic complexities in Rolling Oaks. She asks, "What do I say to them?" (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018), going on to say,

> Let's not think about the fact that you only have options of white teachers. It's ugly, it's hard. You can do anything, and be anybody, because all of these great people. But it's not that simple. It's like, "Hey second grader. Dream big." But you're probably going to get screwed because we have such a racist system. There's a history here of people being oppressed in such major, major ways, and that continues to this day. (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018)

Mrs. Rosman feels she can talk candidly with her students about these issues, so she continues to teach Black History, despite any critique, knowing it is necessary. In 2018, during BHM, Mrs. Rosman developed a spoken-word poetry unit with her tenth graders. She says it was a productive process but unearthed some of her students' more problematic assumptions; "We were talking about big topics and belief systems. Somebody said, 'well Martin Luther King Jr. It's a good thing he ended racism.' The [white] kids were like, 'Yeah, good thing.' In a very serious way, meaning very well" (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018). Though their reaction was surprising, Mrs. Rosman says it is easy for her white students to believe, "it's over. [They think] Racism is something that our grandparents did or dealt with. [Then] I think students of color find it very hard to articulate, 'Well actually…'(Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018).

Though aspects of Mrs. Rosman's BHM instruction were not discussed, her instructional collaboration with families, students, and fellow teachers garners her all measures of "cultural" attainment towards liberatory BHM instruction (CRP 1-3). Mrs. Rosman's students, despite any discomfort, experience academic success in study of topics that are relevant to their lives (CRP.1, & EBH.3). They are invited to challenge the status quo (CRP. 3), and develop in their cultural competencies (CRP. 2). Beyond the portion of the interview I've cited here, Mrs. Rosman, like Ms. Janey, includes a variety of community and family voices in her BHM

instruction, reflects her whiteness, and the impact of her instructional techniques on students' observances of BHM (working towards measures of PCBH.3). In all, Mrs. Rosman was assessed as having four of nine liberatory BHM practices, and therefore is "approaching" liberating BHM instruction.

Mr. James Monure- 11-12th Grade Literacy, Woodland Springs High School

Mr. Monure is a laid back white man in his mid-40s, who is now approaching 20 years in the classroom. Raised by a "family of teachers," he is a celebrated advocate for students' interests, which are explored in his creative writing and hip-hop classes at Woodland Springs High School.

When Mr. Monure reflects on his childhood experience with Black History, he recalls it as "a time when we celebrate the achievements of this and that" (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018). He credits his understanding of Black History to the hip-hop he listened to growing up.

> The Black History that I got started with the music. Public Enemy said, "don't tell me you understand until you hear the man."[47] I was like I guess I should hear them. I looked up some speeches, and I read the autobiography of Malcolm X. It continued from there. (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

Malcolm X's autobiography was just the beginning. Inspired, Mr. Monure continued to explore Black History through literature and music.

> In college, I took a class called Urban Disorganization of the African American. I started realizing there's a particular element of this when it comes to the classroom. Before

[47] Throughout our interview, Mr. Monure draws on references to music and literature, which you will find woven throughout his quotes. Public Enemy (1988) Don't Believe the Hype. *The Bomb Squad*.
Hill, L. (1998) The miseducation of Lauryn Hill.

> Lauryn Hill's album, [there was] Carter Woodson's Mis-Education. I read it. I was like okay, that's really messed up that school is designed like that. Looking at school from his perspective really blew my mind. He was saying some things I thought about. That was the start of me trying to wrestle with that question of Black History Month. (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

These days, Mr. Monure uses hip-hop as a form of communication, analysis, and connection with his students across the year. He is adamant that his students need to see themselves in their learning, and not just during BHM. His interdisciplinary poetics class, hip-hop focused literacy curriculum of his creation, is the first class of its kind in Rolling Oaks. Mr. Monure worked for years to have it included at the high school. After a battle with the school board and local community members to prove its worth, he is proud that his hip-hop class is one where he has the privilege "to show [students] texts that reflect their experiences. We have to show them the potential that they have and give them visible examples of a future that includes them, and performances, and experiences that are vast and diverse" (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018).

Mr. Monure hopes that his classes provide students with a space that they are heard, valued, and where their individuality is an asset. He does not assume that just because students are taking one of his classes, that he understands their perspective, instead, he offers students the opportunity to tell him their interests, In creative writing class,

> the first thing they do is they write two pages about anything they want. This lets me know what their interest is. I have a student in one of my classes who's really into trucks and lives in the country and all of this. He's an African American student. If I come to him with "yo bussage see the new Kendric?" Whatever. He's not interested in that. I think the biggest mistake teachers can make is [to] essentialize African American students or

> any students. Assuming they're into one thing or another. Trying to make connections. There's an *Onion* headline that was written by an English teacher and it was, "Shakespeare was the original Jay-Z." It's so cliché. (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

While challenging these clichés, Mr. Monure acknowledges the limitations of the current educational system. Though he feels that BHM instruction is a necessary component to combating these systems of oppression, he warns, “We often see there's a well-meaning effort to do something that becomes a Band-Aid on a cancer” (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018). He laments about the state of BHM instruction across the high school, acknowledging there is a limited observance, *and* wonders what a reimagined educational system would look like, taking our diverse students’ needs and histories into account, not just one month a year, but holistically.

> I'm fascinated by the question of what that curriculum looks like. It would be very different not just in terms of the language we use but in terms of the world we live in and where it came from. What debts we owe to our ancestors. Not just blood relatives but our intellectual ancestors, our educational ancestors, our proletarian ancestors. I think that's something that most teachers aren't ready for, unfortunately. I wanna do whatever I can to try to teach it. (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

He goes on to talk about what that might mean for Rolling Oaks’ majority white teachers;

> The challenge of [us] white folks educating is urgent, and it's one that a lot of white educators don't wrestle with enough. I want to underscore the importance of us checking our privilege and seeing the world from other points of view. Also, recognizing the specific ways in which blackness and the education of black folks has been done in the service of, to be blunt, the service of white supremacy for most of American history.

> Today [instruction] is often a sanitized vision of a colorblind society that is farcical at best and deadly at worst. (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

Mr. Monure believes that there are people in Rolling Oaks who are growing BHM in the right direction. He is grateful for the work of the lone Black teacher at Woodland Springs High School, and her efforts in reinvigorating a Black Student Union (BSU), which has given Woodland Springs' students another point of access to learning about their community and culture. He is also pleased that Rolling Oaks has been making efforts towards implementing more BHM observances, but admits,

> As much as I like the announcements they're doing, "today in black history you should know about this". . . I want it to be more. I think the social studies department in our school is probably doing a good job. I believe that there are people of good will, and I talk to them about issues. I think they're woke, which feels weird in my mouth. I still think that there's a lot of room for improvement. (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

Throughout our interview, Mr. Monure's critical assessment of programs, practices, and the instructional needs of Woodland Springs students are at the forefront. Instructionally, Mr. Monure's engagement with popular culture through his hip-hop and creative writing classes offers a space for students' multiple identities to be seen and heard within a primarily white educational system (EBH.1 & EBH.3). His critical review of Black History and consciousness throughout the school year encourages students to challenge the status quo (CRP.3), allows them to experience academic success (CRP.1), and grow in their cultural competencies (CRP.2). He shows a capacity for inquiry-based learning, leveraging his passions for hip-hop in Black History research, and ultimately, confidence in his instruction (EBH.2, PCBH.1). These capacities have

garnered Mr. Monure's instruction eight of the nine liberatory BHM instructional components, thereby "meeting" liberatory BHM instruction.

Mrs. Anne Sibbons - 10-11th Grade Real-World Literacy, Woodland Springs High School

Mrs. Sibbons is an experienced high school teacher who integrates multicultural voices into her real-world literature classes at Woodland Springs. She is in her early 40s, and hails from "a very white community" up north. Growing up, she says, "if we had any black students, [everyone] assumed that they were related to Packers" (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019).

Mrs. Sibbons' awakening to Black perspectives and experiences did not come until later in college when she took a class on Colonial Literature. Mrs. Sibbons' professor taught the class with multiple lenses for analysis, always offering a counternarrative to the dominant perspectives found in their texts. This experience Mrs. Sibbons "a lens to kind of critique the information that I was getting" (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019). [48] (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019)

When she became a high school literacy teacher, Mrs. Sibbons drew on her professor's example, introducing diverse literature to her students, making sure she includes multiple intersectional perspectives. She says,

> Almost all of the books [my students read] are by authors of color, with characters of color and LGBT characters. [But,] I'm not like, "Hey, here's another book by a black author that you should read it." I'm just like, "Here's a book and it's really awesome and this is why." I try to offer perspectives and voices that haven't necessarily been heard. (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019)

[48] For example, "He paired like a very classic piece with a postcolonial lens. We read *Jane Eyre* and there's this crazy woman in the attic, right? But then we read *Wide Sargasso Sea* and it's from the perspective of the woman in the attic, and the author was Afro Caribbean. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a 1966 novel by Dominica-born British author Jean Rhys. It is a feminist and anti-colonial response to Charlotte Brontë's novel Jane Eyre (1847).

Despite her commitment to sharing multiple perspectives, Mrs. Sibbons says it sometimes feels like she is pushing for change in a vacuum. She recognizes the limitations, “It can't [just] come from me” (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019). Sometimes she’s at a loss for how to connect. “I have to be conscious of the fact that I am a white woman.” In this consciousness, “I specifically search for [books] that don't match my identity, so that I can learn more, and can empathize with students and kind of understand, maybe, what their experience has been like” (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019).

In her classroom, Mrs. Sibbons draws on primary source documents as a method of engagement. “I offer pieces from Frederick Douglass about how he learned.” She finds it essential for students to understand Black perspectives in the past and their impact on the present. Of Douglass, she says, “his writing is important, and that's always been a part of my curriculum, not just February” (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019).

Mrs. Sibbons’ is also conscious of the needs of readers who are academically behind, as many of her “real-world” literacy students require remedial support. She engages them by focusing on culturally relevant texts that speak to student interests and experiences. She also makes it a point to talk to her students about authors who were themselves “reluctant readers” and promote current work. She draws on authors such as Jason Reynolds, one half of the duo invited to Woodland Springs for an “all school read” co-hosted by Mrs. Sibbons. Mrs. Sibbons recounts the impetus for the event.

> There was an incident on social media and there were [racial] slurs. It incited a lot of emotions in our students. After that, another teacher approached me, and said, “You know, we need a response to this and we need students to feel like we see them and that they can be heard.” So that’s how the idea of the “all school read” came to be. We

> specifically selected *All American Boys* because it had a white perspective and a Black perspective.[49] (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019)

This all-school read was the first of its kind in Rolling Oaks. It began in early 2018, and continued through BHM and into March, with the authors' Jason Reynolds and Damon Kiely visiting to talk to the student body as a culminating event. Mrs. Sibbons and her colleague rounded up donations and district support to purchase a book for each child in the two high schools (approximately 1,800 students, 34% students of color) (DPI, 2019). The text they selected, *All American Boys* (Reynolds & Kiely, 2015), was picked for its multiple perspectives and discussion of police violence, racism, and the resulting community impact. Mrs. Sibbons knew the book might stir some controversy as it addressed the wrongful assault of a Black student by a white policeman. She says,

> We had to tread very carefully. We always had to make sure that people knew that [the book] went on their desk. On launch day, we set them on their desk and we said, you can take it or leave it. If you don't want to read it, but you still want to take it and give it to somebody else, that would be great. (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019)

She goes on,

> We had varying stories of launch day. We had some teachers that were like, it was awesome, [students] gathered and all started reading. Really great stories like that, and then [there were] stories of students ripping up the books before leaving the class. (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019)

[49] Reynolds, J., & Kiely, B. (2015). *All American Boys*. The authors write the story from the perspective of a white and Black boy as they experience police violence in very different ways.

After offering optional book discussions both after-school and at the public library,[50] the authors Jason Reynolds and Damon Kiely came to Woodland Springs for a series of presentations and discussions with the students. The authors spoke to two groups of students in the main auditorium and then participated in a community book discussion at the public library after school.

Mrs. Sibbons reports that the community response was mixed. Some white students felt like the book was calling them racist. Some students did not read it, but panned it online, and complained to school administration. Despite this, she recalls a positive impact on Black students, who she says rarely find themselves represented with such prominence in Rolling Oaks. There was one high school senior, "a African American woman, who just said, 'thank you, this is what we need. We need for this to continue and we need to be heard.' There was a huge round of applause" (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019).

The all-school read is now a distant memory. Mrs. Sibbons reports that despite the positive impact, she doesn't think they'll try an all school read again. Beyond any community pushback, the time and expense of the endeavor became barriers towards future events.

Mrs. Sibbons' instruction in and around BHM offers both public (school-wide) and private examples of engagement with multicultural texts as a method of critical literacy. She bases her real-world literacy instruction on students' interests, identities, and lives in the present (EBH.3). Mrs. Sibbons' instruction draws on popular culture *and* historical artifacts meeting the cultural components of liberatory BHM instruction through the critical evaluation (CRP.3), development of cultural competence (CRP.2), and interest in leveraging students' academic success (CRP.1). Mrs. Sibbons engages in BHM research, looking for multiple samples of

[50]The full book study and participation was an optional event, initiated as a compromise between the teachers' and administration, who feared community response if it was mandatory.

literature that is accessible to her students (EBH.1, EBH.2, PCBH.1). While developing her instructional confidence (PCBH.2), Mrs. Sibbons exhibits an ability to reflect and modify her instruction (PCBH.3) (as in the example of utilizing responses from students' all-school read as a method of reflection and action). In these efforts, Mrs. Sibbons' Black History instruction meets nine of nine components of the liberatory BHM framework, and is assessed as "meeting" liberatory praxis.

Mrs. Vicki Lee- 10-12th Grade Science, Woodland Springs High School

Mrs. Lee, a white, female science teacher in her mid 30s, adores biology, and all things science. A self-proclaimed "catch-all teacher" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019), she is an advocate for social justice education at the high school level, an equity team member, is a teacher known to students as someone who "gets it," in terms of BHM instruction.[51]

Mrs. Lee's adolescence was not dissimilar from the other white interviewees. She recalls learning about Martin Luther King Jr. during BHM, and further reports, "I was raised color-blind. [From an] itty bitty little town, all white, maybe two kids that were not white in my entire schooling existence" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019). This sheltered experience proved challenging for Mrs. Lee when she went to college in a large city. She found the diversity and largess of the city "super scary" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019). It wasn't long before Mrs. Lee returned to the safety of a majority-white state school, rationalizing, "I don't need a big, fancy, out-of-state tuition-to be a teacher, so [I ran] right back into my comfort zone of mostly white people" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019).

[51] Mrs. Lee had already opted-into interviews for this study when I was introduced to Mrs. Lee by the high school step club students who were working with my 4-5th graders. When I asked if there was a teacher I should reach out to learn about BHM at the high school, the majority Black step team unanimously nominated Mrs. Lee. I share this component as a recognition of her impact in creating a space of relevance for Black History within her science curricula.

As she talks about her return to whiteness, Mrs. Lee laughs. She says whiteness is never far from her attention now, not since her personal and instructional trajectory was disrupted only two years ago. It began with her participation in a book study on Lewis & Diamond's (2015) *Despite the Best Intentions*. She recalls,

> That was the turning point for me. I almost left teaching. I was almost done because I couldn't be a part of a system that has systematically done that to kids and people forever. And was built to do that. (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

After a lot of soul searching, Mrs. Lee decided she wanted to continue teaching, but was determined to fight the system of oppression from the inside, changing her instructional tactics; "So, then it was 'Well, if I'm not gonna leave then I need to do something about it'" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019). Since then, she says, "I have been reading anything and everything that I can to work on myself. And then work on my teaching. That has projected me forward into racial equity work. So that's kind of where I'm at now" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019).

Mrs. Lee is disrupting the systemic inequities she sees at Woodland Springs High School by crafting lessons that center social justice (and multicultural history) *inside* her science curriculum, not just during BHM. "So I've been trying to re-tool all of my curriculum to include some type of social justice or anti-racist type ideas in every unit in every class. It's not been happening in all of them. But I'm trying" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019).

As Mrs. Lee contemplates the narratives her science curriculum privileges, she retools the presentations, sharing scientific content alongside questions for critical analysis. For example, in her DNA unit,

> We look at DNA structure right? You've got James Watson, you've got Crick. You've got Rosalind Franklin, who was shafted, but everyone knows about her. So, [the students]

> have a document and they have the names of all these scientists that were involved. And then it asks, “What's their biggest contribution?” and later, “Are they shady?” (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

She laughs again, recalling the students’ confusion the first time they saw this question,

> The kids are like, "Well, what do I do with that?" [I say] "Well, were they shady? Did they cherry pick their evidence? Did they not cite a source? Did they steal people's work?" And the answer is, all of the white men are. All of them. All shady. (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019).

Mrs. Lee delights in the kids’ engagement as they begin sorting through the scientists. She says looking at DNA through a new, more critical lens has upped students’ engagement, and helped them to begin assessing the science from multiple perspectives. In the days following her “shady” lesson, students have the opportunity to research the scientists further,

> So I then leave a little link. . . "If you wanna know how terrible James Watson is, click here." And it takes them to the New York Times article on how he doubles down that black people's DNA is inferior, he just can't find where.[52] He was just given an opportunity through a PBS documentary to take that back because he said it years ago. And he was like, "No. I stand by that." He's like, "The technology doesn't exist for us to find it, but it exists." You're like ... Oh my god. (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

When I ask her how the students react to her re-worked DNA unit, she says, “They are just annoyed by the system. They're like, ’That's not right.’ They ask, ‘But, when you say structure of DNA, why do I think Watson and Crick?’" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019).

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[52] Harmon, A. (2019). James Watson had a chance to salvage his reputation on race. He made it worse. New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/01/science/watson-dna-genetics-race.html

Mrs. Lee is passionate, encouraging students to question all of the information they are given. “It's just that idea of just having them critically analyze. I'm not telling them he's a terrible [person]... I don't want to tell them. I want them to come to that for themselves” (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019). When I ask her how she does this, she says it’s by

> Just making sure that I stay out of the way. So I think especially looking at history, I can give kids the resources. I can give them the tools, but I can't tell them this is what you should be looking at. So, for me, giving these kids an equity lens, is the purpose of teaching them. (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

Beyond her DNA unit, Mrs. Lee facilitates inquiry-based learning by including students’ interests and experiences in her instruction. She invites local public health nurses to present to her class, using statistical analysis as a method of discussing structural inequities. This year, her class is going to “look at housing and should quality housing be a public health issue or not” (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019).

This high school classwork is relevant to students' lives. Mrs. Lee shares that many of her students intend to be doctors or otherwise involved in the public health system, but

> The medical field is full of institutional racism. And so if I can give them some type of equity lens to go forward, they have that voice. Probably my voice, (laughs), in the back of their head. Like. . . "Hmm. This is interesting. Maybe we should look deeper." And that's what science is, too, is, like, critical thinking. (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

Throughout her science instruction, Mrs. Lee privileges multicultural perspectives, anti-racist ideals, and inquiry-based learning. In this manner, her BHM observances, and inclusive science instruction meets components of “cultural” (CRP.1-3), “consciousness” (PCBH.1-3) and “content” (EBH.1-3) objectives towards liberatory BHM instruction. Considering herself

“prepared” for BHM instruction, I have to agree, as Mrs. Lee’s instruction exhibits nine of the nine components of liberatory BHM instruction, “meeting” liberatory expectations.

Chapter 6: Variations in Black History Month Instruction

The twelve educators who graciously shared their stories of teaching Black History were found to reinforce Eurocentric notions of BHM and simultaneously support students' critical exploration of Black Historical content. Participants utilized a variety of instructional methods to teach during BHM (and beyond) while expressing a need for more guidance in addressing historically accurate, culturally relevant BHM instruction. All of the teachers' stories highlighted the complexities of teaching Black History in a predominantly white suburban school district.

Further exploration of teachers' instructional practices provide an answer to research question one: **How do teachers provide Black History instruction in and around Black History Month?**

The findings include significant variations in instructional practice. While some teachers provided BHM instruction that included Eurocentrically informed tropes of Black History, 75% of participants' instruction exhibited *some measure* of the liberatory BHM instructional framework (including measures of content, consciousness, and cultural objectives: Table 3.a). Rolling Oaks' teachers were found to provide more-focused, critical BHM instruction as students aged, with more significant examples of liberatory BHM instruction taking place in grades 10-12. In addition to these variations, results suggest that teachers who built strong relationships with students of color were more likely to engage in BHM instruction. These findings are showcased in the following examples.

BHM Instruction in Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin

Variation #1:

A Majority of Rolling Oaks Teachers Provide Some Measure of Liberatory BHM Instruction

Of the twelve interviewees, five teachers' instruction, representing 42% of participants met all or all-but-one of the markers of liberatory BHM instruction. These teachers' instruction broke from Eurocentric BHM tropes and supported students' critical evaluation of materials and ideas. Another four teachers or 33% of interviewees achieved between four and seven of the markers of liberatory BHM instruction, with their instruction "approaching" liberatory practice.

These results indicate that 75% of the 4th-12th-grade interviewees provide BHM instruction that meets content, consciousness, and cultural objectives (see Table 3.a), freeing BHM instruction from Eurocentrically informed, "whitewashed" practices.

The remaining 25% of instructors, whose instruction is designated as "not yet" exhibiting liberatory practice, are elementary teachers (K-3) who, despite reinforcing non-liberatory instructional practices, modeled intent towards, or elements of liberatory instructional practices during BHM. These teachers' narratives confirmed that liberatory notions of BHM are possible, even at early elementary levels.[53]

Key for Tables 6a. And 6b.

Meeting Liberatory BHM Instruction	Approaching Liberatory BHM instruction	Not yet meeting Liberatory BHM	Indicates school's Title One Status

EBH: Effective BHM instruction (King & Brown, 2014).
PCBH: Practiced Communicators of Black History (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017).
CRP: Culturally Relevant Practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

[53] Rolling Oaks teachers' BHM pedagogies were compared to the nine indicators of liberatory Black History Month instruction. These indicators helped the researcher to identify practices that were well-conceived in terms of content, consciousness and cultural objectives (as identified in Table 3a.) Once again, liberatory BHM instruction draws on the frameworks of "effective teaching" of Black History (as theorized through a Woodsonian perspective) by scholars King & Brown (2014), the traits of "practiced communicators of Black History" from Oberg & Flanagan's (2017) review of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC, 2016) findings. And finally, these content (EBH) and confidence (PCBH) measures were aligned with Dr. Ladson-Billings (1995) "culturally relevant pedagogies," to assess teachers' Black History Month instruction (see Table 6.a. for the overall findings of liberatory practice).
To better explore the components of Rolling Oaks teachers' BHM practice, each participants' interview was run through theoretical coding, the researcher memoing in the margins as she read the interviews through the lens of liberatory BHM praxis. Following this, each participant was given a score of between 1-9 liberatory BHM indicators, as presented in Tables 6.a and 6.b., and reviewed in each narrative, presented in Chapter 5.

Table 6.a.[54] Participants Exhibiting Liberatory Black History Month Instruction							
Participant	**Grade**	**Race**	**Prep?**	**EBH**	**PCBH**	**CRP**	**Liberatory**
P1: Mrs. Hamlin	K	white	No	1	0	1	Not yet
P2: Mr. Livingston	2nd	white	No	0	0	0	Not yet
P3: Mrs. Evans	3rd	white	No	0	0	0	Not yet
P4: Mr. Fischer	4th	biracial	No	3	2	3	Meeting
P5: Mrs. Clark	5th	white	Yes	3	3	3	Meeting
P6: Mrs. Daniels	7th	white	No	2	1	3	Approaching
P7: Mrs. Proctor	9th	white	No	1	1	2	Approaching
P8: Ms. Janey	10-12	white	No	3	1	3	Approaching
P9: Mrs. Rosman	10-12	white	No	1	1	3	Approaching
P10: Mr. Monure	10-12	white	Yes	3	2	3	Meeting
P11: Mrs. Sibbons	10-12	white	Yes	3	3	3	Meeting
P12: Mrs. Lee	10-12	white	Yes	3	3	3	Meeting

[54] Table 6.a. identifies participants' whose instruction was found to be exhibiting liberatory BHM practices at three attainment levels, "not yet," meeting liberatory BHM instruction (as marked "not yet" in the final column), "approaching" liberatory BHM instruction (as marked "approaching" in the final column), and those "meeting" liberatory BHM instructional practices (as marked "meeting" in the final column). These designations are presented in Table 6.b., which sorts the teacher participants' instruction by level of attainment.

Table 6.b. Participants exhibiting Liberatory BHM Practices by Number of Markers Attained		
Markers	**Description**	**Teachers Instructional Assessment**
0-3	Not yet exhibiting liberatory BHM instruction.	Mrs. Hamlin (Kindergarten) Mr. Livingston (2nd grade) Mrs. Evans (3rd grade)
4-7	Approaching liberatory BHM instruction.	Mrs. Daniels (7th grade literacy) Mrs. Proctor (9th grade literacy) Mrs. Rosman (10-12th Grade Literacy/Social Studies) Ms. Janey Taylor (10-12th Grade Special Education)
8-9	Providing liberatory BHM instruction	Mr. Fischer (4th grade) Mrs. Clark (5th grade) Mr. Monure (10-12th Literacy) Mrs. Sibbons (10-12, Literacy) Mrs. Lee (11-12 Science/ Biology)

Methods of Liberatory BHM Instruction

Of the interview participants, 42% or five of twelve participants were found to exhibit 8-9 components of liberatory instructional practices, and are considered "meeting" criteria for liberatory instruction. These liberatory BHM instructors, Mrs. Clark, Mr. Fischer, Mrs. Sibbons, Mr. Monure, and Mrs. Lee, provide an exceptional sample of practitioners who engage in BHM instruction for students' and curricular liberation. Their practices help us to see how Black History is being taught, while providing examples of how it might be improved in classrooms where teachers are not yet attaining content, consciousness, and cultural objectives.

As evidenced in Chapter 5, these liberatory BHM educators were found to:

- integrate multicultural histories (including Black History) in their instruction beyond February, regardless of the content area,
- support students in developing a critical view of Black History content (materials and experiences) and of the world (including systemic inequities),
- acknowledge their limitations as practitioners within an imperfect educational system,

- utilize a variety of instructional tools including district-provided texts and BHM resources,
- leverage the cultural knowledge of the local students and community, welcoming expertise from outside the classroom,
- engage in ongoing historical and cultural research to expand their knowledge,
- expresses a willingness to talk openly about race, racism, and systems of oppression, and finally,
- leverage the interests and identities of their students as a foundational component of their instruction.

Many of the liberatory BHM practitioners also facilitate discussions amongst students and colleagues. A few of these practitioners lead or supported all-school events that leveraged culturally relevant BHM instruction (such as the Mrs. Sibbons' all-school-read, Mrs. Proctor's youth social justice summit, and Mrs. Lee's Black Lives Matter National Week of Action in Schools event (see Chapter 7).

Variation #2:

Some Teachers Present Essentialized Narratives of Black History during BHM

The stories of the three early elementary teacher participants whose instruction is "not yet" meeting liberatory praxis assist in identifying essentialized BHM practices in the community of Rolling Oaks. Survey results indicate that the majority of K-3 teachers present Black History instruction through narratives of heroes and heroines (King & Brown, 2014), the triumph of civil rights, and the terrors of enslavement.

Survey findings show that while kindergarten teachers provide instruction that focuses on "Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks" (N7, N24, N141, N142),[55] "civil rights," (N142, N163, N24) and an "emphasis on Ruby Bridges" (N24, N141, N163), first graders experience similar

[55] N indicates the Number of survey respondents. These references are included here as an example of the prevalence of such responses.

studies. “Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, [and] picture books celebrating diversity” (N5, N16, N18, N33,) were their most frequent focus. When students arrive in second grade, (as Mr. Livingston suggests), some experience lessons on slavery as a component of immigration, while others study “pretty much just MLK and the civil rights movement” (N34, N113, N95, N155). In third grade, Mrs. Evans’ presentation of Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Jackie Robinson as role-models further confirm a focus on heroines and civil rights remain paramount (King, 2018).

Primary schools’ instructional focus on stories of uplift and achievement positions students in a decontextualized historical timeline. Such anachronisms were a concern of Dr. Woodson’s (1933/2018), and continue to be found in K-12 students’ elementary experiences, as The Southern Poverty Law Center’s (2018) report *Teaching Hard History: American Slavery* found;

> Young students learn about liberation before they learn about enslavement; they learn to celebrate the Constitution before learning about the troublesome compromises that made its ratification possible. They may even learn about the Emancipation Proclamation before they learn about the Civil War. (SPLC, 2018, p.15)

Rolling Oaks’ students (such as Mrs. Hamlin’s kindergarteners) focus on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a savior, growing up to be high school students who believe he “ended racism” (Mrs. Proctor, interview). Only later do students discover Dr. King’s actions, and the whole of the civil rights movement, came well after the horrors of enslavement. The impact of these disjointed experiences of BHM in early elementary grades assists students in developing a sense of Black History as a relic, limiting its impacts on American society, and K-3 students in the present.

While some of the comments and methods of K-12 survey participants and interviewees are problematic, it is necessary to highlight participants' altruistic intent. The significant vulnerability these participants exhibited by sharing their practice suggests a willingness to reflect and offers hope for future instructional growth. Examples of essentialized BHM instruction come from teachers' limited historical content knowledge, their "miseducation" (Woodson, 2018/1933), and reliance on district-provided materials and professional development to supplement their (own) Black History instruction.

Variation #3:

Rolling Oaks' Teachers Provide More-focused, Critical BHM Instruction as Students Age

As indicated by the results in Tables 6.a and 6.b, and presented in variations one and two, teachers' BHM instruction is more liberatory in content, consciousness, and cultural measures as students age (also found in NMAAHC, 2016). Teachers who are "not yet" providing liberatory BHM instruction are elementary teachers in grades K-3, whose histories of heroes and subjugation propagate notions of Black Historical miseducation.

While Mrs. Clark and Mr. Fischer (two of the five participants identified as liberatory BHM practitioners) are elementary teachers in grades four and five, the remaining three BHM practitioners identified as meeting liberatory measures teach grades 10-12 at Woodland Springs High School (Mr. Monure, Mrs. Sibbons, and Mrs. Lee). Those found to be "approaching" liberatory instruction were teachers in grades 6-12.

These results suggest that liberatory BHM instructional practices may be more readily engaged with older students, or more practically facilitated by teachers in upper grades. These findings could be due (in part) to the departmentalized instruction favored by teachers in grades 6-12, which allows teachers more time and flexibility in addressing their BHM instruction. It is

worth noting that the survey participants are instructors of literacy and social studies at grades 6-12 except for Mrs. Lee. While 6-12th grade teachers have a bit more autonomy, scholars suggest early childhood and elementary teachers shy away from sensitive subjects in Black History for fear that students are not yet developmentally able to grapple with the subject matter (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017; NMAAHC, 2016). In another example, Mr. Livingston suggests that instructional time is also a significant barrier for elementary teachers (who teach between six and eight subjects each day). Instead of diving deep into these subjects, early childhood and elementary teachers may layer BHM instruction on top of their Eurocentric curriculum as an additive measure, falling prey to the observance of Black heroes and saviors (King & Woodson, 2107); or exceptionalizing notions of Black History only in struggle and subjugation; through enslavement, Jim Crow and civil rights.

While researchers Yacovone (2018) and Benz (2017) found that depiction of African Americans as "problems," ignorant, or possessing history only in confines of slavery permeates the historical narrative, 67% of Rolling Oaks' survey responses (to the question of what do you teach during BHM) were similarly simplistic. This limited instruction reinforces BHM narratives as most often presented in a dichotomy, where Black subjugation is solved by the "triumph" of the civil rights movement, and maintained by a few notable heroes.

Variation #4:

Teachers Who Have Relationships with Students of Color Are More Likely to Engage in BHM Instruction

Six of the seven schools represented by interview participants are Title I schools serving students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (NCES, 2019). In Rolling Oaks, these Title I schools primarily serve students of color. While participants in the preliminary survey

were from all fourteen K-12 schools, the most represented schools in the survey at the elementary level were Cedar Grove, Forest Glen, and Mapleview, all Title I schools. The Title I middle schools, Redpointe and Tamarack, also had the most respondents. In addition to a large number of survey participants, nine of twelve interview participants were instructors in Title I buildings.

Regardless of BHM practices, this participation suggests that teachers from more economically and racially diverse schools were more willing to participate in discussions about BHM, and potentially, in liberatory BHM instruction.

These Title I schools' interview participants were not however, found to be the teachers most frequently exhibiting liberatory BHM instruction, as the majority of participants meeting liberatory practice were from Woodland Springs High School, the only school not designated as Title I in this sample.[56] Woodland Springs has a 24% economically disadvantaged student population, when compared to the nearly 40% economically disadvantaged populations in the other Title I schools of Rolling Oaks (Wisconsin DPI, 2019). These results suggest that although teachers instructing at more socioeconomically diverse buildings are more willing to participate in conversations around BHM instruction than their non-Title counterparts, their instruction is not always liberatory in practice.

Summarizing BHM Instruction in Rolling Oaks

Through these variations, Rolling Oaks K-12 teachers provide Black History instruction in both progressive and regressive manners. While a significant number of interview participants provided *some* of the measures of liberatory BHM instruction (42%), the majority of survey

[56] Woodland Springs' lack of designation as a Title I school is due in part to the significant size of the attendance. Where many of the elementary schools have populations of around 500, this high school has over 1,700 students. By comparison, project-based Heartwood Alternative High School has a 63% economically disadvantaged student population, but serves only 85 students (Wisconsin DPI, 2019)

participants did not (58%). Instead, teachers across all grade levels repeated essentialized narratives of Black History rooted in subjugation and enslavement or the civil rights movement, while maintaining a sizable focus on heroes and saviors (King & Woodson, 2017). K-12 BHM instructional narratives then languished in a dichotomy, where students could believe Black subjugation was solved by the "triumph" of the civil rights movement. These problematic representations were most often levied in grades K-3 (echoing the findings of Oberg & Flanagan, 2017; NMAAHC, 2016), causing students to internalize simplistic notions of Black History at an early age. These incomplete histories then become the basis for students' understanding of Black lives and American history in the present.

Meanwhile, liberatory BHM instruction *is* provided by 42% of teacher interviewees. These teachers' instruction includes critical analysis of Black History through curricular materials, inquiry and discussion that embraces students' interests and identities. Teachers presenting liberatory BHM instruction held strong Black History knowledge, engaged in research around topics that impact students' lives in the present, and continually reflected on and revised their practice. These findings suggest that K-12 BHM instruction in the community of Rolling Oaks is greatly impacted by both systemic and individual constraints, which lead to contradictory outcomes.

Chapter 7: Barriers towards Black History Instruction & Practices for Liberation

Chapter 7 identifies the barriers towards Black History instruction while considering the liberatory possibilities of BHM practice in Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin. Drawing examples from the BHM survey and teacher interviews, this chapter answers research questions two and three: RQ2: Which barriers impede liberatory Black History Month instructional practices? (addressed in section 7.1) and RQ3: Which practices were found to counter Eurocentric narratives of Black History? (highlighted in Section 7.2).[57]

7.1 Which barriers impede teachers' liberatory Black History Month instructional practices?

Rolling Oaks' teachers identified multiple barriers limiting their BHM instruction, including concerns of instructional time, lack of materials, fear of censure, and the impact of "whiteness" and its' related discomfort on their instruction. These challenges limited teachers' BHM instruction and are summarized in three primary concerns: (1) BHM teacher efficacy, (2) fear, and (3) systems of support. This chapter explores these three barriers with evidence from survey participants and interviewees, whose concerns align with examples from the literature.

Barrier 1:

BHM Teacher Efficacy

Rolling Oaks teachers' (self-reported) lack of preparedness for teaching Black History during Black History Month can be considered a barrier of 'BHM teacher efficacy.' In this study, BHM teacher efficacy is defined as a teachers' capacity to produce an effect of liberatory Black History Month instruction. BHM teacher efficacy includes multiple components of a teachers'

[57] To review, for the purposes of this study, a "barrier" is understood to be an obstacle that teachers and/or their students encounter that limits their efforts to provide BHM instruction.

instructional practice, including confidence in content, consciousness, and cultural capacities (Table 3.a.).

Black History Month teacher efficacy is understood through study of Oberg & Flanagan's (2017) analysis of NMAAHC's (2016) study. The scholars found that K-12 teachers across the United States considered Black History Month relatively *unimportant* as a component of Black History instruction when compared to measures of academic knowledge, school leadership, family support, student maturity, and their own cultural authority (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017, p.391). These "important components" of Black History instruction were similarly found to be barriers provided by survey and interview participants in their assessments of "preparedness" for BHM instruction.

Teachers' relative lack of preparation for BHM instruction has marked impacts both in Rolling Oaks and in the wider educational community. As John Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis of the impact (effect size) in educational practice found, collective teacher efficacy has a significant effect size (1.57) on students' achievement.[58] Teachers' collective efficacy provides more than three times the average effect size on student outcomes, positively impacting students' achievement (Hattie, 2009 in Waack, 2020). Moreover, the high impact of teacher efficacy can be generalized towards Rolling Oaks' BHM instructional practice, suggesting that teachers' belief in their collective ability to provide impactful BHM instruction fundamentally improves, or impedes students' instructional outcomes.

In Rolling Oaks, a lack of BHM preparation may be due to the generational impacts of miseducation, which have allowed lackluster Black History instruction to be normalized, allowing Eurocentric renditions of history to dominate the curriculum. As one participant noted,

[58] Placing this in context, Hattie based his analysis on a measure of .40 effect size equaling one years' growth in student achievement (Hattie, 2009).

“I don't know that I feel prepared to teach black history. I think that because the texts that I was taught from were lacking in Black history, I therefore am as well” (N215). Other participants pointed to further content limitations (academic and cultural authority per Oberg & Flanagan, 2017) as exacerbating their lack of preparation. Across all participants, the need for ongoing support and development of BHM knowledge was a frequent concern, best summarized by participant N156,

> This is such an important part of education and I feel like we could and should be more prepared on how to handle sensitive questions and dialogue so we can keep having important conversations about race with our students. I would like some workshops by grade level to dig deeper and have time to share/collaborate what's working and how we can make it more rich and meaningful to our students. (N156)

Other participants (N181, N190, Mr. Livingston, Mrs. Evans) confirmed the need for additional Black History (content-based) professional development, “I feel like I would like and need more training on how to do a better job celebrating and teaching Black History to first graders” (N17), and “I could use more background on Black History" (N 28). These concerns are addressed in Barrier 3: Systems of Support.

Of the elementary interview participants, Mrs. Hamlin, Mr. Livingston, and Mrs. Evans held a positive intent towards BHM instruction (approaching a consciousness objective of liberatory BHM instruction), while at the same time they reported feeling unprepared. Their limited BHM efficacy manifested in instruction, as their lack of historical (content) knowledge dysconsciously reinforced “master” narratives of Black exceptionalism (Mrs. Hamlin, interview, 2018), uplift (Mrs. Evans, interview, 2017), and samples of Black History rooted in Black subjugation (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018). These simplified notions of Black History taught

through oppression, uplift, and “heroes and messiahs” were found as frequent components in pre-service teacher narratives addressed in the research of King (1991),King (2018), and King & Woodson (2017). The researchers found that the majority of pre-service teachers’ Black History narratives included a watered down version of the historical events, reinforcing stereotypes of white racial hierarchy and power rather than Black liberation (King; 2018; Woodson & King, 2017; King, 1991).

Rolling Oaks K-5 survey participants showcased similarly limited examples of heroes and heroines (King & Woodson, 2017), a foods and festivals approach (Grant & Sleeter, 1996), or instruction that alluded to a post-racial BHM narrative that perpetuated notions of Black martyrs having ended racist systems (Van de Mieroop, 2016). When taken together, these early elementary teachers’ (K-5) BHM instruction is most concerning, as it furthers “boot-straps” notions of neoliberal ideologies that perpetuate a colorblind narrative (Bonilla-Silva, 1995), our youngest learners quickly and eagerly embrace.

This problematic instruction, provided at the earliest levels in Rolling Oaks, develops students’ Black Historical miseducation when provided as “truth” by teachers. These teachers willingly admit discomfort in providing BHM instruction, as exemplified by the elementary data shown in Figure 7.1.a., where the majority of teachers felt unprepared for BHM instruction.

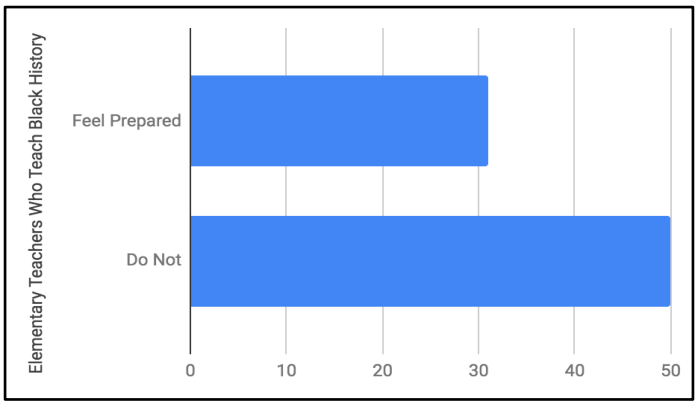

Figure 7.1.a Elementary Teachers Preparedness to Teach Black History

It is not just the elementary teachers who feel unprepared for their BHM instruction. Across grades K-12, 71% of Rolling Oaks' survey participants considered themselves "unprepared" for BHM instruction. The results of teachers' self-assessment of relative preparedness to teach Black History during BHM at middle and high school levels (HS1 and HS2) are presented in Figures 7.1.b. -7.1.d.

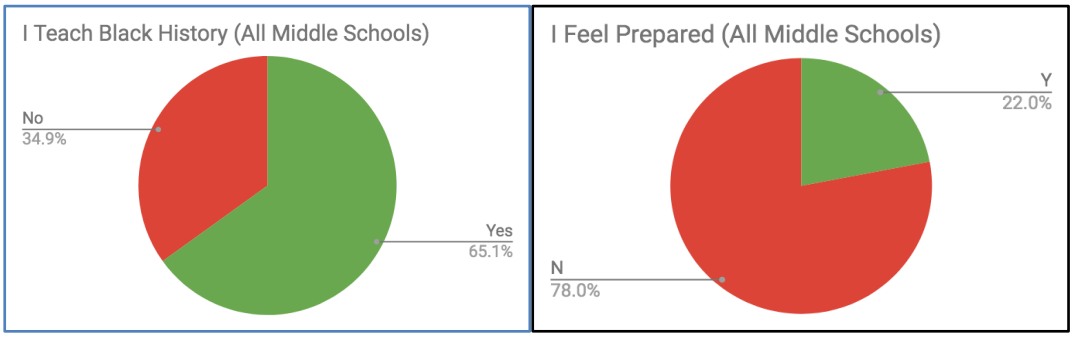

Figure 7.1.b. Middle Schools Teachers Preparedness to Teach Black History

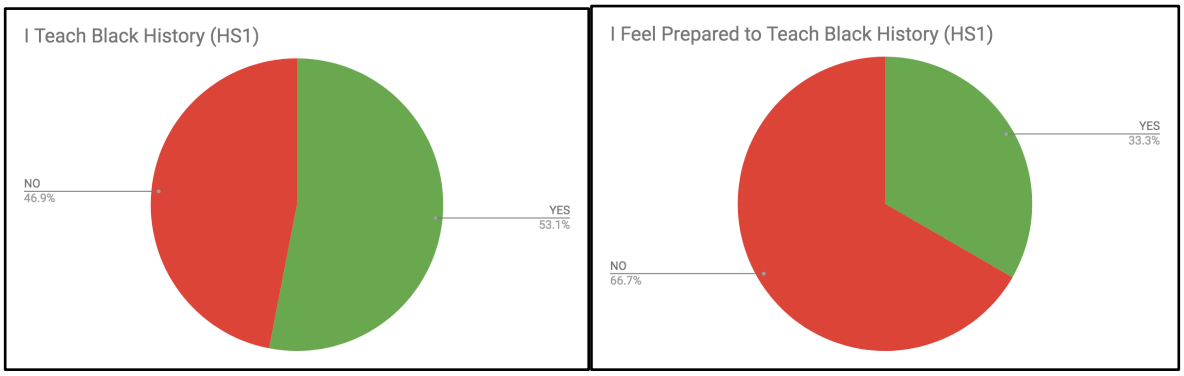

Figure 7.1.c. Woodland Springs High School Teachers Preparedness to Teach Black History

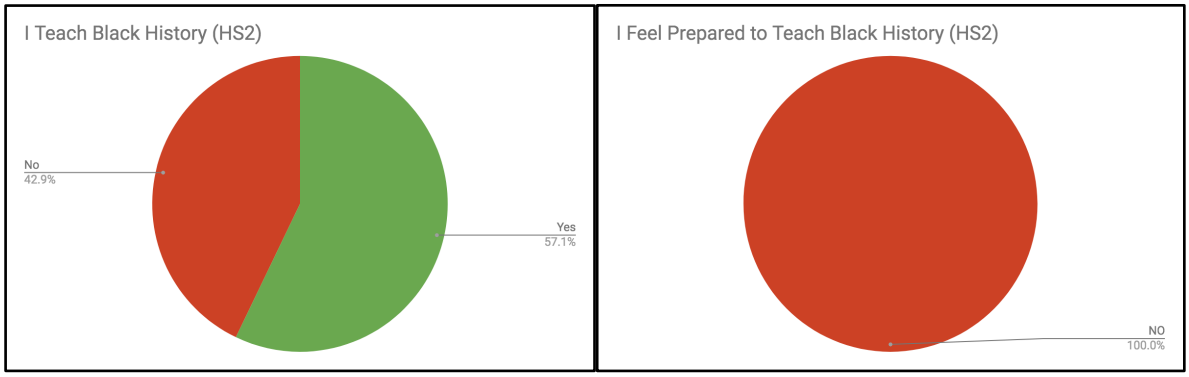

Figure 7.1.d. Heartwood High School Teachers Preparedness to Teach Black History

Beyond simple "preparedness" to teach Black History during BHM, Rolling Oaks' K-12 teachers addressed the need for additional Black History Month professional development (N181, N190) including direct conversations around race and history (N61), delivery of vetted resources for BHM instruction (Mr. Livingston, Mrs. Evans, N188), and supports for BHM instruction provided across the school year (N54, N182). These requests address the "important" components of Black History instruction identified by Oberg & Flanagan, which can be reviewed in preliminary findings of Chapter 4, and will be addressed in Barrier 3: Systems of Support.

In all, BHM teacher efficacy encompasses teachers' concerns over content knowledge, materials, and collegial support in teaching Black History during Black History Month. This

efficacy, and the resulting skills of "unprepared" BHM practitioners are a significant barrier towards Rolling Oaks teachers' BHM instruction.

Barrier 2: Fear

Throughout interviews, surveys, and observation of the BHM events in Rolling Oaks, teachers' fear was a significant barrier towards liberatory BHM instruction. This fear may be considered a component of teachers' BHM "consciousness," and was a barrier exhibited in a variety of ways. Teachers express concern through fear of offense, fear of content, fear of censure, and a more covert fear, which I'll call fear of losing one's identity. Examples of these elements of fear are discussed in the sections that follow.

Fear of offense:

Rolling Oaks' teachers indicated they have a fear of offending others during BHM instruction. In general, the sanitized BHM narratives propagated in the United States by majority-white teachers (NCES, 2017) removes difficult topics in Black History from focus. When teachers consider integrating more difficult histories that would hint at the realities of the Black experience in American History, teachers may shy away from these discussions for fear of offense. In one such example, a first-grade teacher at Chestnut elementary (whispered to me that she) was fearful of teaching Black History to her students in front of Mrs. Jenkins, an African-American special education assistant who supported her classroom. Rather than collaborating with this teacher, she set the topic aside, preferring not to teach Black History during BHM for fear that her colleague would be offended by her bumbling teaching of Black History while white (Chestnut Elementary, school visit field notes, 2017).

In Kindergarten at Cedar Grove Elementary, another teacher shared her confusion and concern after receiving an email from a parent that she had caused their (white) child to think

that ‘all white people are bad’ (Cedar Grove, personal communication, 2018). This notion mainly concerned the teacher as she’d only just begun reading about Martin Luther King, Jr., and had not even considered how to teach more challenging content. This fear of offense, and how to address parent, student, and colleague reaction to topics in Black History limits teachers’ engagement with difficult topics, as they feel discomfort and fear in the discussions that may result from their instruction.

Fear of content:

Difficult content was a concern for teachers across K-12 buildings. Educators in both survey results and interviews expressed fear of sharing content that might negatively impact students, families, or their peers by presenting subjects that were morally difficult or topics they felt unprepared (or unable) to explain (N4, N17, N61, Mrs. Evans, interview, 2019). Unfortunately, the grim realities of American History include the enslavement of millions of Black people, resulting in generations of power and privilege more easily attained by white folks. The horror of enslavement, segregation, Jim Crow, racism, and continued violence against Black bodies and minds is a reality that for many students, they experience, but cannot yet explain. When they turn to their handheld devices and internet searches for support, these topics and difficult historical content are available for students' consumption without the assistance of an adult for critical review.

Such concerns are studied by scholars Trouillot (1995) and Yacovone (2018) who warn, it is no longer only teachers, texts, and teaching materials that develop students’ representations of Black History and BHM. For many North Americans, an understanding of history begins with exposure to popular media (Trouillot, 1995). Similarly, for many students in Rolling Oaks, their nearly unlimited access to phones, YouTube, and social media platforms (beginning in late

elementary school) result in students coming to school with questions that prove difficult for teachers to address.

Fourth-grade teacher Mr. Fischer, a participant "meeting" liberatory BHM instruction, acknowledges the trauma students experience from these sources but finds it challenging to discuss traumatic topics with his students. He struggles, not in efforts to hide this content from them, but in the reflection of his discomfort learning about Black History during BHM as a child (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2017). Though he wants to shield his students from the traumas of Black History, their engagement with popular media may force his hand. Mr. Fischer, who considered himself only partially prepared for Black History instruction in the preliminary survey, may have assessed himself so due to his reluctance to teach the painful histories entwined within narratives of BHM in America. As an illustration of one such topic, I share an excerpt from my bracketing journal as a point of reference. This sample of text was a reflection from my interactions with Mr. Fischer and his students after a Black History Bowl practice session during BHM 2019. [59]

> I talked with fourth and fifth graders about Emmett Till yesterday. Mr. Fischer was not too keen about it. He chastised me, and said that the content was PG-13, and I shouldn't have [told them anything about Emmett Till], because they would all go look him up, and had come back to class wanting to talk about it. It sounded like he shut the conversation down, he was so uncomfortable with it. I offered that if he had any parents complain (I assumed this was his concern) he was welcome to send them my way. I shared my own discomfort in the moment the kids brought it up, but expressed that I wanted to be honest

[59] I have led a "Black History Bowl" for 4th and 5th grade students at Cedar Grove Elementary for the last two years. The bowl began as a method for interested students in 4th and 5th grade to study Black History outside of February, engaging in research from December to March of each year. During Black History Bowl lunch meetings, held weekly, students study Black History, research topics of interest, and participate in "quiz-bowl" style competitions over Black History content. Participants in this bowl have been about 50% students of color. All students in 4th and 5th grade are encouraged to attend, and they help to develop categories, questions, and celebrations of their learning.

about it. The kids' knew I studied Black History, so they asked me about it. One of the Black 5th graders had watched a Netflix documentary mentioning Emmett Till, and he and his friends had been talking with all the other kids about it (I didn't know students gossiped about history like this), so we paused in our lunch bunch to talk about what happened. I shared what I'd learned while reading about Emmett Till in Tyson's (2017) book, *The Blood of Emmett Till*. I said Emmett Till was a young man accused of whistling at a white woman, and that he was lynched (or brutally murdered) by the woman's husband, despite having done nothing wrong. I shared that Emmett's death, and Mamie Till's public sacrifice in opening his casket to the world, had helped to inspire the civil rights movement in a big way. Through his mother's difficult choice to display his body, his death was the spark that lit the fire of civil rights.

Now, upon reflection, I don't know if that was the right decision. I upset Mr. Fischer, and I obviously can't go back and take it away. I hope that didn't cause [the students] harm, but I do know that the students stopped what they were doing and paid attention, curious, trying to understand why something like that would happen to such a young man. For many of them, Emmett Till was a kid who looked a lot like them. I don't know why this discussion (mine and Mr. Fischer's) bothers me so much. I think it's that teachers don't talk about things like this in class, or with one another because we're scared. We're scared because we worry that families and parents will call us racist, or inept. That's a theme Mr. Fischer has brought up in conversation with me a number of times over the last three years, as we've discussed difficult topics in Black History. I think, for some parents, they don't want their kids to know the realities of our history. It's painful, and I know it's awful. In terms of teaching, I don't know what the right thing is,

> and I don't know if I'm supposed to tell them things like that when they ask, but I guess I think that I should." (Pitts, Bracketing Journal, February 14, 2019)

This incident and the realities of discussing Emmett Till's death with upper elementary children proved difficult for both Mr. Fischer and me. His discomfort with the students' discussion of Emmett Till revealed a fear in his concern over addressing difficult content with elementary students. Similarly, my concern over his reaction was palpable. Such an example provides evidence of Mr. Fischers' (and my own) discomfort in addressing difficult topics of Black History, suggesting that fear of difficult topics provides yet another barrier towards liberatory BHM instruction.

Swindler-Boutte & Strickland's (2008) research posited that in a similar vein, limited research exists in PreK-5th grade instruction of Black History due to teachers who underestimate their students' cognitive abilities. In their assessment, many elementary teachers fear young children are incapable of understanding issues beyond their immediate lives (p.134), despite being exposed to such images and stories through multiple means of contact in modern media (Alex, middle school student interview, 2018).

Concerns or "fear" over parent, community, and student reaction to BHM instruction were further exhibited in multiple interviews (Mrs. Proctor, interview 2019; Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019; Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019; Mr. Livingston, interview 2018), and in teachers' experiences with response to BHM through instructional censure.

Fear of censure:

Rolling Oaks interview participants' experiences of censure while teaching during BHM have further created barriers towards liberatory BHM instruction. In examples from Mrs. Proctor (9th-grade literacy) and Mrs. Lee (10-12th grade science) whose instruction is approaching and

meeting liberatory BHM measures, both teachers discussed the fear of experiencing censure both personally, and professionally.

In her 2019 interview, 9th-grade teacher Mrs. Proctor repeatedly addressed concerns of fear as a barrier towards both districtwide policies that impact teachers and students, and in implementation of BHM instruction in her classroom (see Chapter 5). Her fear of generalized (and personal) pushback from the community and students over BHM content came from prior experiences of being rebuked by colleagues and administration during preparations for the youth social justice summit. In reflection on these events, she says,

> We were talking about planning for the social justice summit, and I was like, I think that we have to say right off the bat, that bigotry, it's not okay… Intolerance is not okay. The [Rolling Oaks' School District (ROSD)] wants to be tolerant of everything, and the only thing that [they're] not going to be tolerant of is getting pushback. We need [ROSD] to get people to disagree, and they [the school district] should have an opinion too. We have to say that's not acceptable here. Why are we so scared to do that? Are we so scared to say that racism, if somebody is racist or has a racist act, or homophobic, or whatever, that that's not acceptable, and that's going to be treated as a hate crime, or a hate incident, because it's never a crime here. But it should be. (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019)

When she addressed these concerns with her former administration,

> I was told I was being divisive. It isn't divisive, that's hate speech. When people call kids N words or fags or whatever, that *is* hate speech. It should be treated like that. And why are we so scared to do that? (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019)

Mrs. Proctor addresses not only the fear she perceives from the Rolling Oaks school administration (in their efforts to take action addressing students who use hate speech), but also

the concerns she has over parents, administrators, and students' censure of her instruction and positionality. After a 2018 youth social justice summit garnered a negative response from some community members, she was worried about being "in trouble" (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019). Drawing on the following comments, it appears possible that Mrs. Proctor's students' reactions to her positionality provide a reason for concern.[60]

> I have a kid who wears a MAGA hat to class every single day. And he does it because he knows, I mean, the school knows. So it's hard because I can't tell him not to wear it. It'd be against the rules for me to tell him not to wear it. I'd be targeting him if I told him not to wear it. But I also think [he's] telling... showing, everybody else in this room where he stands. He doesn't think that, right? It's like you're basically wearing your hood to school. (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019)

Mrs. Proctor's experiences with student, family, and district response to her positionality, her outspoken methods of engagement with students' interests, identities, and leadership in minority student groups leave her in a vulnerable position. Her fear proved warranted, as she witnessed in early 2019 when her high school colleagues experienced very public censure of their instruction.

In February 2019, Mrs. Lee and colleagues from the Woodland Springs' equity team created a presentation that included a video on empathy as a kick-off to Rolling Oaks' first observance of *Black Lives Matter in Schools National Week of Action* (BLMAS, 2020) during BHM. Mrs. Lee recounts the purpose of the presentation.[61]

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[60] As an openly gay teacher, and advocate for marginalized students, Mrs. Proctor's outspoken and social justice oriented behaviors indicate a vulnerability not evidenced by other practitioners interviewed.

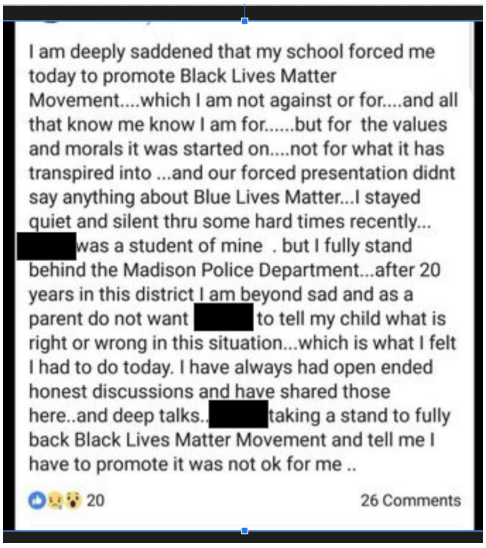
[61] "Black Lives Matter At School is a national coalition organizing for racial justice in education. We encourage all educators, students, parents, unions, and community organizations to join our annual week of action during the first week of February each year" (Black Lives Matter At School, BLMAS, 2020).

> Empathy was the lesson. The black kids sit together and the white kids sit together and the Asian kids sit together [at Woodland Springs], so, like, that was a big reason, [getting the students to realize] 'the people around you might live the exact same life that you do. You just don't know it.' But you're just afraid to talk to them. That was the intention of the lesson, to just get kids thinking about the things ... Like, what other people bring to the table they might not know. That was it. All it was. The whole "Black Lives Matter" at the end was to give them credit, because we took their questions. We can't just plagiarize. Right? So, we were just citing our source and then the themes for every day after [the presentation] came from their 13 principles. (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

The video, shared with each of Woodland Springs High School teachers, was intended to be an introduction to Black Lives Matter in Schools Week of Action. Instead, the video and subsequent reaction from staff and parents created a two-month curriculum struggle in which Mrs. Lee and her equity team colleagues felt the impact of Rolling Oaks School Districts' lack of clarity in their position around instruction that includes calls for recognition that students' "Black Lives Matter."

Following the slideshow, presented the second week in February 2019, a peer at Woodland Springs posted a response to the lesson on Facebook, shown in

Figure 7.1.e. Colleagues' Response to Black Lives Matter At Schools 2019 Presentation. [62]



This post (showing only 26 comments in the screen capture), grew to have more than 1,000 comments within the first week of responses, as parents and community members both for and against calls of "Black Lives Matter," responded. Comments also included students from Woodland Springs, who jumped into the discussion, defending or condemning the content. The online conflict and heated responses from all stakeholders drew media attention, resulting in multiple print and TV news stories addressing the issue (Facebook, 2019, public posts). For Mrs. Lee, who was credited with creating the content in the lesson (though only a part of the presentation), the weeks following this presentation included a fear of losing her job, as well as relentless harassment directed towards Mrs. Lee, her advocates (colleagues, parents, school officials), and students of Woodland Springs high school via social media platforms.

The afternoon of our interview was only a week after the social media post (Figure 7.1.e.) and resulting firestorm. Mrs. Lee was trying to keep cool despite ongoing concerns for her job, and her students. She shared a bit about what it was like to face the ire of the predominantly

[62] This was a public Facebook post copied from the evening it was posted in February 2019. According to IRB, as the post was available without logging into an account, I was able to use it without revision to my application for research (IRB, personal communication, March 2019).

white community in Rolling Oaks, many of whom expressed a great concern over the school highlighting Black Lives Matter.

> I mean, my dad recently said to my husband that he's worried about my job ... He [wondered] why am I stirring everything up when the population of non-white kids isn't that big in Rolling Oaks. He was like, I can see this being ... I can see doing all this work if the population was bigger. He and I need to have a conversation about that comment. (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

She shakes her head, considering the challenges of addressing this concern both at school, and at home, and simply asks, "Why can't we say that the black lives of our students matter in our schools?" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019) It appears that in Rolling Oaks, such a statement draws contempt of the majority white suburban community. At Woodland Springs, Mrs. Lee says that the response was not so simple, instead,

> the narrative got taken over by [social media response] and then as we didn't respond... Like, the week went by and no one responded [to the event in school].[63] That sent the message to our kids that they don't matter. That, like, they weren't supported. I mean, I had kids saying that, if they fired me over this, that they were gonna walk out of school. And I was like, 'Okay, guys, like, I'm not gonna get fired. It'll be fine.' And they were like, 'Are you sure?' (Laughs). [I told them],'Uuhh. Yeah. I'm not getting fired.' But, I mean, I ... Like, on Tuesday night after, like, this all happened, I was ... I looked at my husband. I'm like, 'Am I getting fired?' And he was like, 'Maybe.' (Laughs). (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

[63] In the days following the social media backlash, no formal response was issued by the school, and the teachers involved were dissuaded from responding online for fear of job security (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019; Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2019).

From one lesson, presented during BHM and developed with the intent of developing students' empathy, the resulting pressures Mrs. Lee experienced were professional, public, and interpersonal. These included a fear of losing her job, familial stress from her father's comments, and, most importantly, a fear of what Rolling Oaks' reaction taught her students. She says since then, it is apparent

> that's no other place for the conversation to go. That is the difficult part and I know it's been difficult for kids, too. Professionally, I can take awkwardness. That's fine. I can take the heat professionally and personally. Like, you know, I've had friends that have been like, a little crabby about it. Like, 'What are you doing? Blah, blah, blah' I can take that. But it's like the kids' side of it. I mean, we've had kids that've asked to be removed from [the teacher who posted the Facebook response's] class. And have gotten denied for it. [They've been told]'Nope. Figure it out,' essentially. That, I think, is traumatic. Now [you] have a teacher who these kids think is overtly racist. (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

Now a year later, both Mrs. Lee and the teacher who posted the comments on Facebook remain at the high school. Though the community response was swift, and months of curriculum review, online trolls, and discomfort followed, Mrs. Lee's willingness to suffer the consequences of community, student, and peer backlash are an example of why fear of censure stands as a barrier towards liberatory BHM instruction.

Fear of losing one's' identity

Finally, Rolling Oaks' majority white teachers' recognition of their culpability in perpetuating notions of Eurocentric histories may serve to covertly impair teachers' liberatory BHM instruction through concerns over loss of ones' identity.

For the majority of teacher interview participants, a monocultural upbringing, and inculcation of Eurocentrically focused histories admittedly hindered how they view their abilities to teach Black History during Black History Month (Mrs.Evans, Mr. Livingston, Mrs. Hamlin, Mrs. Daniels, Ms. Janey, and Mrs. Rosman). While some of the practitioners have found methods of breaking from these Eurocentric histories, the pain associated with their revision of personal identity is notable. For many participants, generalized "whiteness," serves as a barrier towards their potential for liberatory BHM instruction.

Interviews with Mr. Livingston (2nd) and Mrs. Evans (3rd) provided examples of whiteness as a primary barrier towards BHM instruction. Both teachers commented on the privilege of their whiteness, and exhibited the use of stereotypical language about Black families and students. Their concerns about parent involvement and role models (Mrs. Evans), or white family push back (Mr. Livingston), resulted in both teachers engaging in BHM instruction that was only in service to Black uplift or standardized curriculum.

In her 3rd-grade classroom, Mrs. Evans' white-dominant positionality provided an excuse for not engaging with BHM research. She offered the following statement as a limitation beyond her control, "to be honest, I don't know a lot beyond the standard Black History Month people. Just 'cause I am white and I grew up in white middle class suburbia." This whiteness impacts Mrs. Evans' students' BHM performances as they are limited to figures that she (in her white-dominant positionality) feels connected to, possibly on account of her own experiences learning about these figures as a child.

Beyond these participants, a number of the teachers in survey responses indicated that they felt awkward (N40, N61), and generally uncomfortable teaching Black History (Mrs. Rosman, Mrs. Evans). Despite these findings, admissions, and confessions of privilege, few of

Rolling Oaks' teachers engaged in research to fundamentally change (or improve) the ways they teach Black History or felt inclined to relieve themselves of this ignorance. Historical research was one of the primary measures missing in participants interviews, providing barriers for Mr. Monure, Mrs. Proctor, Mr. Livingston, Mrs. Hamlin, Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Rosman, and Mrs. Daniels, all of whom failed to meet either component EBH.1 or PCBH 2. towards liberatory BHM instruction (see Table 3.a.).

The ultimate fear I discuss here, the fear of losing one's identity, is driven by participants' whiteness,[64] and comfort in maintaining the white-dominated status quo of BHM instruction. It is necessary to point out that this whiteness is multifaceted, as is not only internalized by the white. Miseducation (Woodson, 2018/1933, King, 1991), has allowed "whiteness" to be a term appropriately applied to any teacher, regardless of race or ethnic background, who educates *or was educated* through "whitewashed," Eurocentric pedagogies. These "enwhitened" teachers' practices have inadvertently been sanitized by the neoliberal hegemony which may dysconsciously impact the minds and hearts of even the most "liberal" educators when provided a monoculturally informed history.

Across participants in this study, whiteness and white-bias are limitations to BHM instruction. These limitations may be in part due to the discomfort associated with the challenge of learning and *genuinely* wrestling with one's culpability in perpetuating systems of oppression. These concerns proved salient in the interviews of Mrs. Lee, Mrs. Proctor, and Mrs. Daniels. These three educators expressed feeling both pain and fear associated with breaking from their white-idealism.

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[64] (which awareness of is also considered an liberatory practices: see section 7.2)

The fear of losing one's identity that has been encountered as a barrier towards liberatory BHM instruction occurs when an educator who benefits from white privilege begins to grapple with the true history of our nation, a history full of pain and subjugation, which has negatively impacted people of color for centuries and into the present. When educators can no longer ignore the social hierarchies built on systems of white privilege, the realization can come with a new recognition of self. This recognition fundamentally changes the manner in which a teacher may see themselves, their families, and their histories and present. Teacher participants, experiencing the realization of their culpability as white-folks embedded within a system of privilege may fear this new identity. Though it may sound trite, such a recognition of power and privilege comes at a great personal expense; as this recognition (if it is to inspire change), comes with the loss of white-privilege without guilt. This acknowledgement changes educators' realities, it also allows them to see themselves as part of a system of oppression that "has systematically done that to kids and people forever. And [the system] was built to do that" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019) The system of education was "built" to segregate students of color from their white peers, built to center white idealism and systems of knowing. Liberatory BHM practitioners still experience this barrier, and grapple with it as a measure of continued reflection and revision. As Mrs. Lee explains,

> you have to be okay with you being a part of the problem. Right? And that is so uncomfortable. Like, you have to accept that you ... the things that you do affect kids in ways that you don't intend and then once you recognize that, like, yeah, it sucks, right? Like white guilt sucks, but you gotta move forward. Like, I think a lot of our teachers start to feel that uncomfortableness and then go, 'Nope. Done.' Like, they just back right

> off of that. That whole, like, uncomfortable area is where, like, that growth happens. (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019)

Matias (2016) compares the pain of white teachers recognizing themselves as actors in this white supremacist system, to a loss of identity. She frames this loss through her experience as a mother losing her "motherhood" through miscarriage. Having known herself as a mother, the loss of her child removed this understanding of self. In this loss, she experienced a great sense of mourning for who she thought was and no longer could be. This melancholy, mourning, and recognition of self as something other than what one was "meant" to be, is similarly experienced by (many white) teachers who see themselves as "good" teachers who intend their instruction to benefit students. Now, reflecting on the realities of Black students' and communities' experiences, these same teachers find themselves to benefit from white privilege, and the recognition, if it is to inspire change, requires teachers' reimagining of self. The person who emerges from this process is no longer the person who began the process of exploration. In her text "*Feeling White*" (2016), Matias further explores the feelings of pain and melancholy that extend from white teachers post-awakening. These feelings of melancholy offer one explanation for the fear that teachers exhibit when asked to evaluate their BHM instruction. Recognizing one's culpability in the system of historical oppression requires a radical reimagining of the self in space and time. This loss of self inspires fear in many educators seeking to transform their practice, halting their forward momentum towards liberatory BHM instruction.[65]

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[65] In one example of a participant radically reimagining themselves after such realization, Mrs. Lee reports learning about her own white fragility and the impacts her ignorance had on perpetuating systems of oppression. She says this knowledge changed her, not just instructionally, but in life. She nearly left her position as a high school science and biology teacher, as the pain of acknowledging her part in the system of white supremacy was too much to bear. The more Mrs. Lee learned about the ways in which white society marginalized and "othered" her students and colleagues from diverse backgrounds, the more adamant she became in centering non-dominant voices in her science classroom. The pain that Mrs. Lee felt over losing her sense of self in her monocultural understanding of systems of power, was turned into an opportunity as Mrs. Lee worked through inquiry to promote diverse perspectives in her high school classroom. Though her identity and ideologies have changed through this process of

Heartwood High School teacher Mrs. Rosman discusses this fear and discomfort as she addresses her white privilege and positionality. She says she has not yet been able to move beyond her struggle with whiteness.

> I think the biggest roadblock is having to look inward. . . . I mean, because I already have. I'm racist. I'm a racist person. I treat my students differently, I just do. It's my job, and it's exhausting, but I have to every day remember that. I'm coming from a lens of privilege and power. School has always worked for me because it was made for me. It's exhausting to look through that lens, but that is something you have to do first, I think, and be willing to just sort of admit I don't know. I'm doing the best I can and I want to be open. That's hard as a teacher, because you're not used to ... You're the one with the answers. (Mrs. Rosman, interview, 2018)

Mrs. Rosman experienced the fear of recognition, fear of losing herself in fully addressing this white identity and privilege, and recognizes the pain of this discovery. Though a teacher who is there for her students, and works hard to understand BHM instruction, the lack of historical research she has personally and professionally engaged in (as a component of BHM teacher efficacy) has limited Mrs. Rosman's ability to break from this fear towards more liberatory BHM instruction. Mrs. Rosman appears frozen in this barrier, so consumed by the fear of what may come, and the resulting impacts of her whiteness that she maintains a position of "approaching" liberatory BHM instruction.

Barrier 3: Systems of Support:

In order to improve BHM teacher efficacy, and overcome fears, systems of support for all K-12 teachers and students will be necessary. These "systems of support" include the priorities

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self-assessment, Mrs. Lee reports the joy of watching her students learn to question dominant narratives, as they review scientists and ask, "are they shady?" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019).

of K-12 buildings during BHM, Rolling Oaks' School District policies for instruction, curriculum and practice, a review of overall community structures, and national policies for BHM instruction. These systems are barriers to Rolling Oaks teachers' liberatory BHM instruction. These "systems" address content, consciousness, and cultural concerns that require the review of BHM policies and practices at all levels.

Building & District BHM Curriculum:

At the building level, Rolling Oaks schools do not provide a mandatory BHM curriculum for teachers' implementation, nor do they mandate specific lessons or objectives concerning Black History be addressed across the school year. The absence of BHM policies in K-12 education is normative in American schools, as the majority of BHM instruction remains the teacher's discretion (King, 2018; SPLC, 2018). This lack of direction allows each K-12 building in Rolling Oaks to establish normative practices for BHM instruction and delivery. In this variance, teachers have expressed concerns over the limited direction for BHM instruction, the lack of materials, and the need for additional training and professional development (Mr. Livingston, Mrs. Hamlin, N54, N182).[66]

Despite Rolling Oaks' recent (2017-present) iterations of BHM, which have included district recommended materials for BHM instruction (including picture books, articles, and videos), the variance in K-12 teachers' levels of comfort and use of these materials is significant. While some teachers blame the school and district for lack of support with these materials, (N69, N188, Mr. Livingston, Mrs. Hamlin), other participants suggest that district policies and

[66] Though these concerns can also be assessed as a component of individual teacher efficacy, teachers who already work towards liberatory BHM instruction still need systems of support to back up their instructional practices so that when experiences like Mrs. Proctor and Mrs. Lee's (as presented in fear of censure) occur, the teachers know they are supported in their practice by policy and administration.

expectations of the more "traditional" (multi-subject) instruction limit the opportunities for teachers to integrate Black History instruction across the year (N54, N182 & Mr. Fischer). These limitations in building and district observance of BHM indicate that there does not yet exist a "culture" of urgency towards BHM instruction in the community of Rolling Oaks.

While *some* buildings focus on BHM activities such as door decorating competitions, assemblies, or poster contests, these representations all stand as activities valued outside the classroom and require little teacher and student research. These BHM presentations "checked the box" for yearly observances, while allowing teachers to carry on with their generalized Eurocentric curricula. Such iterations include Mrs. Evans' BHM assembly that featured Black uplift, Mrs. Hamlin's *I Have a Dream* video which propagated a post-racial ideal, or Mr. Livingston's concern with "time" that led him to only present Black History through immigration, positioning the African enslaved as "immigrants" coming to America (Mr. Livingston, interview, 2018).

These instances confirm Salter & Adams (2016) research which suggests, "teachers allow representations of BHM to become cultural tools that impact instruction" (Salter & Adams, 2016). While I observed BHM in Rolling Oaks, 'cultural representations' such as posters, videos, books, and BHM presentations provided narratives that minimized or denied white responsibility or reconstructed Black History in a favorable way to serve the monocultural white ideal, relying on "safe" presentations of Black History each year.

By identifying school and curriculum as a barrier towards BHM instruction, Rolling Oaks teachers maintained that a lack of resources, materials, or access negatively impacted their BHM instruction. Meanwhile, it *could be* that their (purposely maintained) production of BHM allows teachers to deny their responsibility in perpetuating false narratives. When the (2018) SPLC

study “Teaching Hard History” found resources were a barrier frequently identified by teachers, the study posited that teachers’ discomfort in exploring difficult topics of enslavement was not only on account of materials but subject to the limited ways in which they critically engaged with their materials (SPLC, 2018). In this manner, despite district-supported resources and instructional content that *might* be mined for critical assessment (as evidenced by the liberatory practitioners Mrs. Sibbons, Mr. Monure, Mrs. Clark, Mr. Fischer, and Mrs. Lee), Rolling Oaks practitioners feel limited in their ability to engage with these materials, further requesting instruction from school or district personnel.

District and Community Level BHM Support

When discussing suggestions for improved BHM instruction, multiple interview participants linked the lack of BHM instruction to the district’s policies and practices overall (N7, N17, N26, N61, N80, Ms. Janey, Mr. Monure, Mrs. Proctor). These participants suggested reforms in generalized practices, as well as district systems of instruction. Ms. Janey reflected on the need for sweeping reform, saying

> I feel like it needs to be school level, it needs to be curriculum. It needs to be with poster stuff. It needs to be culture. It needs to be the way kids are spoken to. The way the parents are spoken to, [the] opportunities [students are given]. It just needs to be an all-around overhaul. [Our district thinks it's doing well] Okay, great so we have student advocates that are of color. Okay? What do they want a cookie? I'm sorry, it's not good enough. (Ms. Janey, interview, 2018)

Ms. Janey's reference to the "district thinks it's' doing well," refers to the celebration of 13% staff of color districtwide, a common promotional tool utilized to attract families and staff to Rolling Oaks' schools (ROHR, 2019, district mailing, 2019).[67]

In another example of teachers' requesting sweeping district reforms, Mrs. Proctor's assessment of barriers included a shift in focus from instructional support to relational capacity. She said,

> We spend so much time in this district focused on stuff, and we spend so little time actually teaching people how to build a relationship and trust with kids in a way that allows students to really be themselves, and feel seen. [In terms of that type of instruction,] some people are here, and some people are there (points to opposite ends of the room). Some people do need to be explicitly taught, how do you relate to a kid who has a completely different experience than you? (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019)

Mrs. Proctor's assessment points not to explicit BHM instruction or materials, but to a shift in focus from the district providing the "stuff" to a need for focus on relational ideals to support students' identities in the present.

Mr. Monure also suggested that the shift in district response to students' and families' needs may be necessary. Throughout his tenure in the district, he's observed the rapid increase of students and families of color joining Rolling Oaks community. He says, "At the end of the day, it is a farming community, which is dealing with an influx of folks from Chicago that don't look like them. I think that's at the heart of the schism" (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018).

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[67] This 13% includes all support staff, food service workers, janitorial staff, and district office personnel, which impacts the overall assessment. In terms of faculty of color who work within the school buildings, only 6% of Rolling Oaks' teaching staff are people of color (ROHR, 2019). Calls for the district to improve the practices for hiring candidates of color have been widespread over the course of the study, coming up frequently in parent, student, and administrator interviews, as well as in meetings of the African American Parent Network (AAPN), across years 2017-2019 (Pitts, bracketing journal).

National Policies for Black History

Rolling Oaks School Districts' lack of BHM or Black History instructional policies is not unique. Although disjointed state mandates exist (King, 2018; SPLC, 2018), no national consortium (including the National Council for Social Studies and the Common Core State Standards) has provided a comprehensive model for the delivery and instruction of Black History. Further exacerbating white teachers' sanitized teaching practices, American textbooks frequently rewrite history, removing examples of Black persecution, liberation, and existence (Mills, 2007; Brown & Brown 2010; King & Brown 2014). The absence of guidance and simultaneous wealth of problematic Black History materials gives teachers, schools, and districts the impression that BHM and Black History teaching practices are not worthy of attention. This lack of attention leads to inconsistencies in students' understanding of Black History *in context.* Our nation has not done the work to create a system that values, humanizes, and supports Black students and Black History in a meaningful, accurate, and empowering way.

Scholars King (2018) and Emdin (2015) suggest that schools and teachers can shed the dominant BHM narratives in school, instead, providing spaces of intellectual combat and cultural awareness where anti-racist teachers of all backgrounds are supported as they push back against the "hate, segregation, and terrorism" (Woodson, 1933 p. 22) so prevalent in schools. In the 94 years that have passed since the inception of Negro History Week, the need for further instruction, collaboration, and acknowledgement of Black History remains.

7.2 Practices Towards Liberation

Rolling Oaks' survey results (Chapter 4) and teacher-participant narratives (Chapter 5) highlighted a wide array of BHM instructional strategies, levels of teacher preparation and comfort, and a wealth of BHM subjects addressed (including people, movements, and events).

The first portion of this chapter will review the salient practices Rolling Oaks' teachers found to circumvent the white-washed, Eurocentrically informed curriculum and instruction found in American classrooms during BHM (Dagbovie, 2018; Oberg & Flanagan, 2017; NMAAHC, 2016).

To upend the problematic representation of Black Histories as only valid in celebrations of heroes and saviors (King & Woodson, 2017), foods and festivals (Grant & Sleeter, 1996), or Black subjugation through narratives of enslavement, civil rights, and Jim Crow (King, 2018); Rolling Oaks teachers challenge Eurocentrically informed BHM pedagogies by:

- leveraging the cultural knowledge of Rolling Oaks' students and communities,
- reflecting on (and revising) their BHM instructional practice,
- assessing their whiteness/white positionality and the impacts it has on instruction,
- engaging in professional learning beyond district-provided opportunities,
- committing to activism as a part of and beyond the school community,
- embedding culturally relevant BHM experiences for students' critical engagement.

Though these practices were most often provided by practitioners found to be "meeting" liberatory BHM instruction, these practices were further utilized by Rolling Oaks teachers across grades K-12 (as evidenced in survey responses). These salient practices are listed below, with examples of the BHM instruction as exhibited by the teachers in Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin.

Liberatory BHM Instruction

The following six practices confirm that *all* K-12 teachers have the potential to provide liberatory BHM instruction that counters Eurocentric notions of Black History. Liberatory BHM instructors are found to:

1. **Leverage the cultural knowledge of their community, connecting Black History to students' lives in the present.**

Rolling Oaks' teachers exhibited the ability to leverage the cultural knowledge of students, families, and the wider Rolling Oaks community in examples of collaboration that far exceed BHM and school curricula. These student-focused, engaging, and culturally relevant experiences have assisted both students and teachers in breaking down the "traditional" notions of BHM as presented through the white gaze, working towards Dr. Carter G. Woodson's vision of liberatory praxis (2018/1933).

An example of a teacher engaging with the local community is high school science teacher Mrs. Lee, who said, "the teacher before me expected kids to memorize every single bone in the body. For me, I think that doing something like the community health project is more important" (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019). Mrs. Lee's community health project began with a presentation from a community health nurse, who shared evidence of the disproportionate health outcomes that plague Rolling Oaks' students and families (as further evidenced by the designation of Wisconsin as "the worst," see Beck, 2019; Schnieder, 2015; Taylor, 2014). Afterward, Mrs. Lee asked her students to consider how America historically allowed such inequities to persist. She further engaged her students in reflection, asking them to "look at the housing and [think] 'should quality housing be a public health issue or not?"'(Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019). Mrs. Lee's community health project included students' critical evaluation of their experience as members of the Rolling Oaks community and spanned far beyond February. This project connected the students to the available community resources through the public health department. The instruction was relevant, personal, and had implications for BHM in both the past and present.

In a middle school example, Mrs. Proctor engaged community members in her youth social justice summit. Minority student interest groups helped to plan the event, and expressed the need for a session exploring perspectives on the discord between movements for "Black Lives Matter" and "Blue Lives Matter." In response, the 2018 social justice summit featured parents, teachers, and "a former assistant DA, and then a Navy vet, and [we] had them talk about Colin Kaepernick, and free speech, and [then] kids could discuss" (Mrs. Proctor, interview, 2019). This discussion allowed students to assess the import of Black Lives Matter as a modern cultural movement, along with its' non-exclusivity. The high student engagement that resulted from the conversation was just what Mrs. Proctor had hoped for: "Just getting kids to be able to say, wait, I can support Black Lives Matter and think that my uncle, who's a cop, is a good dude. [I can do both]" (Mrs. Proctor, Interview, 2019). Mrs. Proctor's commitment to providing students with multiple perspectives, including voices from experts and laymen in the community allowed students access to a wide variety of ideas and identities, all of which inform their construction of Black Historical knowledge in the present.

In addition to these examples, Rolling Oaks' teachers showcased their ability to leverage the cultural knowledge of the local Black community through repeated classroom visits and whole-school events. Mrs. Sibbons' author visit during the all-school read at Woodland Springs brought in parents, school board members, and community advocates to listen and learn along with students from authors Jason Reynolds (who is black) and Damon Kiely (who is white). After the author's presentation, students were able to speak to their peers in a public forum. Mrs. Sibbons recounted the impact, sharing her memory of one students' response:

> She was in the front row and she just spoke so strongly. She was an African American woman [student] who said, "thank you, this is what we need. We need for this to continue

> and we need to be heard." Then there was a round of applause. (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2018)

Following the authors' presentation, book clubs and community conversations were prepared by Mrs. Sibbons, who encouraged her high school students to participate in an ongoing dialogue.

In an elementary example, Mrs. Clark's open invitation to family members to join their classroom and share stories and music created an ongoing school and home connection where students' cultures, interests, and voices were valued beyond BHM. Speaking about her music project, she recounted one visitor's response, "Mr. Hill is always here laughing, 'How do you know this stuff?' [he says] 'This is what my grandma listened to.'" Mrs. Clark's regular inclusion of cultural stories and the welcoming atmosphere for students' and their families' created a community of care.

In each of these examples, Rolling Oaks' teachers leveraged the cultural knowledge of students, community members, parents, and nationally recognized "experts" (in the case of the all-school-read) who held multiple racial and cultural identities. These community collaborations helped to connect Black History and BHM to students' lives in the present and encouraged their understanding of systemic barriers and those barriers' impacts on themselves, their families and friends.

2. **Reflect, revise and improve their practice.**

Rolling Oaks teachers who engaged in reflective practice that included revised instruction and implementation (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983) of BHM pedagogies were *all* assessed as liberatory BHM practitioners.[68] This reflection allowed the educators to continually refine their

[68] This reflective practice proved a salient consideration, as, like the majority of those "approaching" liberatory practices, none of the instructors "not yet" exhibiting liberatory BHM practice were found to be actively reflecting

BHM instruction, removing issues of bias, oppression, and the Eurocentric gaze from their practice. Though no instructor was (is) without room for critique, these teachers' continual reflection was engaged through multiple approaches, and offered a great deal of promise towards relevant, critically informed BHM instruction.

An example of a teacher's impactful reflection includes Mrs. Clark's revised civil rights unit. After pulling away from students' obsession with heroes and saviors as presented in many versions of BHM instruction (King & Woodson, 2017; King, 2018), Mrs. Clark spoke about the challenge of shifting the students' mindsets about their studies, saying,

> The struggle is real, and we work towards [liberation]. I bring up current civil rights leaders, people of now that are still working. [They don't understand] there's a whole grassroots movement. Like Martin Luther King was a great man, but [he was] a figurehead of sorts. There's so much more underneath him that happened to make him who he was. He was a great speaker, but all the women sitting in the Baptist churches putting together stuff. [It was the] impact of their collective action. (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018)

Through reflection and continual practice, Mrs. Clark has been teaching her students to look past the predominant heroes, and explore those who helped make the civil rights movement possible. Her BHM instructional practice not only breaks from Eurocentric notions, but further encourages students to consider *their* ability to influence the future of the nation. Mrs. Clark reminds her students of the potential they have to change the narrative, telling them, "We're history!" and

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on and revising their BHM instructional practice. The *only* practitioners found to be doing so, were those who met liberatory expectations for BHM instruction.

asking them to actively consider, “What do we plan on doing in our time?” (Mrs. Clark, interview, 2018).

Mr. Fischer provided another example of reflective practice as he considered his experiences as a child during BHM, along with iterations of BHM students have experienced by 4th-grade. His assessment that students’ heads are “full of straw” when it comes to historical content does not lead him to blame his colleagues or the curriculum. Instead, noting the absence of students’ historical knowledge, he focuses on providing engaging lessons for all. These instructional moves have inspired the critical evaluation of the reasonableness of Colin Kaepernick’s protest, and consideration of the financial disparities in world economies through manipulation of Starburst (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2017).

As the only Black and biracial participant in his study, Mr. Fischer’s reflection included consideration of current students’ experiences, as drawn from his own recollections of BHM in school. He remembers, “historical knowledge of any sort was hard to come by. I don't think my instructors were well tutored, at all, on even their own histories. So, what I learned, I learned on my own.” (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2017). Fearing the same fate for his students, his instruction is meant to engage, and simultaneously honor his students’ vulnerability. He says,

> The Black kids know that they're alienated. They can't articulate it, but they express it. The election; [didn’t] happen in a vacuum. They took it personally. They're worried about this wall thing. I think that it's important to acknowledge how bad things have been, and how bad they ... [are] 'Cause if you don't, they're gonna continue to have the sense of alienation that they can't put a finger on. So, I think in terms of me establishing rapport with my minority students, making the [BHM] lessons for everyone, and about everyone, is essential. (Mr. Fischer, interview, 2017)

Mr. Fischer draws on his experiences as a biracial child in a predominantly white system, relating to his students' experiences, and striving to make the content relevant to all of his students' lives.

Though there are other examples of Rolling Oaks' practitioners engaging in reflection (including in Mrs. Lee's revision of physiology curriculum, Mrs. Sibbons all-school-read, and Mr. Monure's interdisciplinary poetics class), Mr. Fischer and Mrs. Clark's models at the elementary level (grades four and five) are especially salient, as they are an anomaly in the Eurocentrically dominated experience of American students in K-5 schools (Oberg & Flanagan, 2017), and in the elementary schools of Rolling Oaks, where 71% of teachers feel unprepared for BHM instruction. Furthermore, Mr. Fischer and Mrs. Clark's liberatory BHM instruction provide a model for the 45% of *elementary* survey participants (Chapter 4, p.53) who comprise the majority of teachers teaching Black History during BHM in the community of Rolling Oaks.

3. **Recognize the impacts of their "whiteness" (or white positionality) on their BHM instruction**

All of Rolling Oaks' interview participants shared details about their positionality and modeled vulnerability in their willingness to talk about its resulting impacts on their BHM instruction. While many teachers named their whiteness, only some were able to recognize the impact their positionality held on their BHM instruction. These educators utilized this knowledge as an impetus for improvement.

Teachers' acknowledgement of their (majority white) positionality and its use as an instructional practice for improved BHM instruction included Mrs. Sibbons' discussions with her students about her positionality and their identities:. "I have to be conscious of the fact that here I am a white woman" (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2018). When providing book talks and

recommendations, she says, “[I don’t say,] hey, I'm going to tell you about books by your people" (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2018). Instead, Mrs. Sibbons goes out of her way to find literature that focuses on marginalized identities, hoping that each student will “feel more of a sense of belonging, more seen and [will know that] they have a voice in this" (Mrs. Sibbons, interview, 2018) learning. Mrs. Sibbons further uses primary source documents as methods of engagement, allowing Black authors and activists to speak for themselves, rather than through her enwhitened experience.

In another high school example, science teacher Mrs. Lee reflected on her white positionality and the ways in which it impacts her practice:. “I was raised colorblind, and only realized it when [I] followed [Pacific Education Group’s],[69] racial autobiography and Oh my god. That [realization] just bubbled. My goodness, how white I grew up and how white my parents are” (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019). Mrs. Lee’s recognition of her white upbringing and formerly colorblind ideologies do not limit her ability to provide liberatory instruction. Despite feeling ashamed by her whiteness at times, saying, ”I would like to take my white skin off lately” (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019), she uses the growing knowledge of her privilege as an inspiration develop as an “anti-racist” educator. These days, Mrs. Lee continues to explore her positionality in the context of racial equity work. The results have driven her to take up equity work that helps to develop the racial consciousness of her colleagues. In 2019, Mrs. Lee led the high school faculty in a book study on *White Fragility* (DiAngelo, 2018) taking inspiration from her “awakening” experience with *Despite the Best Intentions* (Lewis & Diamond, 2015) (Mrs. Lee, interview, 2019).

[69] Pacific Education Group is a paid organization who provides professional development to school and district equity groups. Their work can be read about here: https://courageousconversation.com/

Similarly, Mr. Monure's reflections on his white privilege have allowed him to engage with students in his hip-hop and creative writing classes on a more authentic note. He has not stopped in his racial identity work, instead, he draws inspiration from Black authors and filmmakers who he's learned from. During our interview he rhetorically asked me, "What does it mean to be white?" and then provided an anecdote from the filming of Spike Lee's *"Malcolm X.*" (1992). In Malcolm X. and Alex Haley's (1965) *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Mr. Monure recounts,

> Malcolm X said that one of his greatest regrets was when the white college student came to him and said, "'What can I do?'" He said, '"Nothing.'". . . Spike Lee shot a scene later on in Malcolm's life, but he didn't use it in the movie. The answer [Malcolm later] gave was great. It was what a lot of us have heard, which is you go to the other white folks and say, "Why you being racist. Stop." That's easier said than done. I do think that has to be at the core of a conscious white identity is an understanding of the nature of white supremacy, the history of it, and then placing yourself in the struggle against this. (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

Mr. Monure's open struggle against white supremacy was not exhibited by all of the teachers interviewed, as whiteness and white positionality also offer a concerning barrier that were considered in Section 7.1.

Overall, teachers' acknowledgement of their "whiteness" and white positionality has positively impacted Rolling Oaks' practitioners Mr. Monure, Mrs. Lee, and Mrs. Sibbons, among others, encouraging them to identify their whiteness in conversations with students and colleagues. Through further study of their white positionalities and Black History, these teachers do not let their whiteness limit their potential to learn and teach during BHM.

4. **Engage in ongoing professional learning both in and beyond the school district (including book studies, conferences, and collaborations)**

Many of Rolling Oaks interview participants sought out additional professional development to hone their BHM instruction, develop a critical consciousness, or engage in ongoing historical and cultural research. Mrs. Lee's book studies, Mrs. Daniel's use of resources from the *Leaders in Black History Padlet* (Appendix B), and Mrs. Clark's development of the civil rights unit all came to fruition through professional development opportunities provided *within* the school district. How these teachers gathered resources, engaged with their students, and brought their learning back to the classroom are examples of teachers utilizing professional development as liberatory practice for BHM instruction.

Beyond professional learning experiences provided by the district, Mrs. Rosman, Ms. Janey, and Mrs. Proctor have all explored professional learning opportunities provided by county facilities, drawing on outside resources and educators to help improve their Black History knowledge. These learning experiences have led them to invite speakers to the social justice summits (Mrs. Proctor), summer school classes (Ms. Rosman), and have encouraged field trips with their students to meet Black community members out in their place of business (for example, Ms. Janey's trips to the firehouse and boxing ring with her students).

5. **Commit to activism as a part of, or beyond the local school community**

Many of the BHM practitioners interviewed for this study engaged fellow (adult) members of their school and community in learning about equity, social justice and civic responsibility. Mr. Fischer, Mrs. Clark, Mrs. Sibbons, Mrs. Lee, and Mrs. Proctor are all members of their school-based equity teams who engage in professional development (both receiving, and giving the learning) to provide support to their peers in conversations of equitable

practice.[70] Four of these practitioners, or 80% of the participants in school-based equity teams were found to be exhibiting liberatory BHM instructional practices, with Mrs. Proctor "approaching" liberatory instruction (only assessed as "approaching" based on her hesitancy to engage in more challenging topics--discussed in 7.1). This finding suggests that participation in school-based equity collaborations, including activism through providing professional development to the school community is a contributing practice towards subverting Eurocentric BHM instruction.

Further examples of engaged practitioners seeking activism outside the classroom include Mrs. Proctor's development of the youth social justice summit (see Chapter 5), Mrs. Lee's Black Lives Matter Week of Action events at Woodland Springs (section 7.1), and Mr. Monure and Mrs. Clark's outspoken support for the Rolling Oaks Education Association, the local teacher union.

6. **Embed socially relevant (current and historical) subjects for students' critical exploration in their instruction.**

When teachers and students critically evaluate cultural objects such as curriculum, trade books, posters (see Salter & Adams, 2016 example) and experiences (like the all-school-read) they challenge the dominant Eurocentric narratives of Black History. The opportunity for students to evaluate artifacts and materials was used by a number of practitioners who challenged students to think critically about their content, funds of knowledge, and the impacts of historical records on their current realities.

Mrs. Lee's inclusion of the public health project, Mrs. Proctor's social justice event, and Mrs. Clark's exploration of civil rights movements then and now, help students' to consider the

[70] These practitioners all have experienced multiple years of professional development through the Pacific Education Group.

impacts of Black History in the present. These relatable examples allow students to evaluate their roles in history, encouraging them to take action, think deeply, and critically assess the materials they are given.

In a memorable example of such critical evaluation from the interviews, I entered Mr. Monure's high school literacy classroom to find walls covered with visual stimulus. The posters on his wall depicted popular culture through cartoon sitcoms, hip-hop and rap acts, and curiously, an "upside down" world map, featuring Antarctica at the top, and the North Pole on the bottom. When I asked about his posters, and his upside down directions (literally, directions written upside down for students), Mr. Monure responded that he was trying to get the students to examine things from a different perspective. Rather evaluating his classroom as they do all the others at the high school, the students have to think about their perspectives, (even in his directions) and must work to attain understanding. He gestures to the world map and says,

> I wanna get a map with no words so I can say, "How do you know it's upside down?"... I think that one of the most important things that teachers [and students] need to wrestle with is this question of "here's your knowledge coming from?" and "What are the limits to that perspective that you bring?" (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

Mr. Monure's posters aren't just for show, he acknowledges his passions through them, and he says it's important to be real in front of the kids:

> Kids can sense when it's phony. What I always say to them is, "The number one rule in hip hop is you gotta keep it real." I tell the students straight up, "Look, this is where I'm coming from, and I'm not gonna hide my Public Enemy posters because that's who I was growing up. I didn't want to be Chuck D, but I wanted to be in the rock box video with Run-D.M.C." (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

Mr. Monure hopes to inspire his students and his peers to consider their classroom spaces, their interpersonal connections, and the ways in which they value each other's identities. For Mr. Monure, it's more than just music, it's about seeing the students, *really* seeing them and their passions as part of the learning, far beyond BHM:

> "How can you make authentic meaningful connections between your world and the world of the students?" [I say to them] along the way, if you can swing by the curriculum and bring some of that with you great. If not, you know what I tell the students? "There's curriculum and there's life. Sometimes we're gonna talk about stuff that's not in the curriculum." (Mr. Monure, interview, 2018)

Mr. Monure's methods may seem eccentric, but his message is well received, as his students utilize a critical perspective in his interdisciplinary poetics and creative writing classrooms. His students are also aware that Mr. Monure values their lives outside the classroom, connecting his practice with their lived experience. Mr. Monure invites his students to engage in reimagining perspectives, evaluating their "truths," and exploring the possibilities of their identities in the content they create.

In a different tact, some interview participants showcased critical literacy techniques (Ciardello, 2004) for students' practical evaluation of BHM texts. Whether it be in Mrs. Sibbons' author studies or Mrs. Daniels' research projects, the use of literature as a starting place for Black History instruction should be considered (see also King & Woodson, 2017; Landa, 2012; Tatum, ND, see also Jamison, 1978; Landa 2012; Lamme, Astengo, Lowery, Masla, Russo, Savage, & Shelton, 2002). Researcher Beverly Daniel Tatum recommends that instructors begin by engaging with relatable texts that provide examples of Black resistance, white allies, and a multi-faceted representation of all people (Tatum, n.d.). Tatum's techniques are used in Rolling

Oaks during BHM, at both elementary and high school levels. Mr. Fischer (4th), Mrs. Clark (5th), Mrs. Daniels (7th), Mrs. Proctor (9th), Mrs. Sibbons (10-12th), Mr. Monure (10-12), and Mrs. Lee (10-12) all utilized critical exploration of texts by students as a primary component of their instruction. These practitioners report that the use of these strategies has assisted in their ability to engage students in the evaluation of culturally relevant, historically accurate, and engaging materials.

Results in Summary

In this chapter, the barriers teachers experienced (section 7.1) in BHM instruction provided measures of assessment that could be used by districts seeking to evaluate their BHM instruction. These barriers were followed by six practices Rolling Oaks' teachers exhibited towards countering the "traditional," Eurocentric narratives of Black History (section 7.2) found in schools and curriculum. These barriers and liberatory practices stand as possibilities that could be utilized by any practitioner, school, or district seeking to improve their BHM instruction.

Barriers towards liberatory BHM instruction identified in Rolling Oaks' K-12 schools included; (1) BHM teacher efficacy, which addressed issues of individual teacher preparedness and research, (2) fear, including practitioners' fear of content, offense, censure, and loss of identity, and finally (3) systems of support, which encompassed the schools', districts', and national limitations in support of Rolling Oaks' teachers' BHM instruction.

Suggestions for subverting Eurocentrically informed BHM narratives include: (1) leveraging the cultural knowledge of students and communities, (2) reflecting on (and revising) BHM instructional practice, (3) assessing one's whiteness (or experience with white-washed curriculum) and its impacts on instruction, (4) engaging in ongoing professional learning beyond district-provided opportunities, (5) encouraging activism as a part of the school community, (6)

and embedding culturally relevant BHM experiences for students' critical engagement. These suggestions offer teachers a path towards liberatory experiences of BHM instruction for all K-12 learners.

Utilizing these findings, schools, districts, and teachers may leverage the liberatory BHM practices Rolling Oaks' teachers have modeled while avoiding the barriers. Results suggest that in order for us to reimagine a humanizing history full of the richness of the Black experience, it will be necessary for schools, districts, and individuals to collectively leverage these liberatory practices to improve Americans' History knowledge. Engaging in Black History research, while acknowledging the barriers experienced by this sample of K-12 educators, districts, including Rolling Oaks, can utilize the findings as a roadmap towards the implementation of BHM instruction that meets content, consciousness, and cultural objectives.

Chapter 8: Formidable Challenges and Liberatory Possibilities in BHM Practice

In the last seven chapters we have explored the community of Rolling Oaks, Wisconsin, its teachers' BHM instruction, and the barriers and liberatory practices they've encountered. As I reflect on the journey, I can envision the community, and see these teachers in my mind's eye as they talk about a more complete vision of BHM, one that serves and values all their students.

In this final chapter, I begin by restating the research questions and reviewing the key findings. Next, I outline the significance and generalizability of the results and discuss future research opportunities. Finally, I'll close the study with a recent vignette of students from Rolling Oaks that speaks to the urgency of this work moving forward.

Conclusion

This study was developed as an inquiry into how Rolling Oaks' teachers teach Black History in and around BHM. It asked: (RQ1) How do teachers provide Black History instruction in and around Black History Month?, (RQ2) Which barriers impede teachers' liberatory Black History Month instructional practices? and finally, (RQ3) Which practices were found to counter Eurocentric narratives of Black History?

The findings revealed that Rolling Oaks teachers teach Black History in and around BHM in both harmful and liberatory ways. While a majority of K-12 teachers were found to replicate problematic narratives of uplift, subjugation, and limited stories of saviors and heroes, there were other teachers who were able to break from these BHM tropes. Overall, 42% of the interview participants' instruction met the criteria for liberatory BHM practice. Measures of content, consciousness, and cultural objectives towards liberatory BHM instruction drove the analysis as seen in Table 6b.

In the classrooms of liberatory BHM practitioners, the teachers:

- integrated multicultural histories (including Black History) in instructional content beyond the month of February,
- supported students in developing a critical view of Black History and of the world,
- acknowledged limitations as practitioners within an imperfect educational system,
- utilized a variety of instructional tools including district-provided texts and BHM resources, and
- leveraged the cultural knowledge of students and the community, welcoming expertise from outside the classroom.

It was not merely in attainment of measures, but also, in the teachers' willingness to engage with difficult discussions of race and history, and acceptance of their own, (or the systems') white-dominant positionality and its impacts on their instruction, that gave way to liberatory BHM instruction in their 4th-12th grade classrooms.

It was in the variations, in the idiosyncratic expressions of critical inquiry, that these liberatory practitioners' BHM instruction stood out. They talked about Black History and its impacts on their students' lives, even when they were afraid. These teachers' stories, their experiences provide exemplars from which to build a better understanding of a liberatory BHM instructional model.

While five of twelve interview participants' BHM instruction was assessed as "meeting" liberatory BHM measures, the remaining seven interviewees and a *majority* of the survey participants were found to rely on Eurocentrically informed curriculum and neoliberal practices. These practitioners most often relied on their own experiences as children learning about Black History to replicate "safe" instructional content. They may see possibilities for improvement, but wait for district administrators and peers to provide direction on how to integrate Black History instruction across the school year rather than researching and implementing impactful BHM

practices themselves. These practitioners experienced multiple barriers towards liberatory BHM instruction which most often included: (1) BHM teacher efficacy, (2) fear, and (3) systems of support. These barriers addressed concerns of teacher confidence, preparedness, and content knowledge; fear of difficult content, offending others, personal and professional censure, and loss of white-centric identities. These barriers limited teachers' potential towards content, consciousness, and cultural objectives as advanced in the liberatory BHM instructional framework.

Despite these challenges, dynamic methods of BHM instruction took place across grades 4-12. The survey and subsequent interviews found teachers leveraging the cultural knowledge of Rolling Oaks' students and communities, reflecting on (and revising) their BHM instructional practice, assessing their whiteness/white positionality, and engaging in professional learning beyond district-provided opportunities, all while embedding culturally relevant BHM experiences in their content year-round.

These liberatory practices were not exhibited by teachers who were trained in exceptional ways, assisted in their instructional practice, or otherwise supported by district, state, or national systems. Instead, these *liberatory* BHM practitioners were everyday teachers (interviewees in Grades 4-12) who were confident in their content, consciousness, and cultural knowledge of Black History. These practitioners navigated the barriers that others encountered. They used the resources at their disposal and leveraged their students' interests and identities to improve their BHM instruction.

Implications

Black History Month in Suburban Schools: An Examination of K-12 Pedagogies is the first study of its kind. While other studies have explored the experiences of teachers teaching

BHM at a particular grade level or school, including Pre-K and K (Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008), grades 1-2 (Landa, 2012), grades 5th-7th (Merelman, 1993), middle school (King & Brown, 2014), no other study to date has explored BHM instruction across a K-12 school district, or given voice to multiple teachers' accounts of instruction. Though its findings drawn on the experience of Rolling Oaks' teachers, the generalizability of the results are significant, as Rolling Oaks' demographics mirror the *largest* percentage of schools (40% suburban schools) attended by American children, as identified by the National Center for Education Statistics (2017).[71] Furthermore, Rolling Oaks' majority white (94%) teacher demographics (ROHR, 2019) mirror those of 80-89% white teachers in the United States (NCES, 2017).[72]

This study is also the first to include the stories of multiple white teachers teaching Black History during BHM. As found in a review of the literature (Chapter 2), prior studies primarily addressed the pedagogies of one white teacher at each site (King & Brown, 2014; Landa, 2012; Swindler-Boutte & Strickland, 2008), which did not allow for a comparison of practices across the teachers' classrooms or schools. Although Merelman (1993) did observe multiple white teachers, their voices, and stories of teaching Black History were not included, suggesting this study adds a new perspective to the literature.

Beyond the participants' and district demographic generalizability, findings from this study are supportive of any school or district seeking to review their BHM instruction. The research questions can be applied to any K-12 BHM study moving forward. Schools, teachers,

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[71] NCES demographics further show that these 40% suburban schools are followed by 30% city schools, 19% rural schools and 11% small town schools by percentage of students in attendance across the United States (DPI, 2019; Riser-Kositsky, 2019; NCES 2017).

[72] It is important to note that this study provides only the first component of the full ethnographic analysis of Rolling Oaks' BHM instruction. Subsequent research into the attitudes and experiences of Rolling Oaks' students, parents, and administrators' during BHM will develop the researcher and readers' ability to analyze the impacts of BHM instruction across grades K-12.

and scholars may use the liberatory BHM framework (identified in Chapter 3, Table 3.a.) as a tool for analysis and/or to support improved instructional practice across content areas. The theoretical underpinnings for this framework come from sustainable, nationally normed studies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Oberg & Flanagan, 2017), while drawing on effective Black History Instruction through a Woodsonian lens (King & Brown, 2014).[73]

Future Research

The relative paucity of literature on America's 80- 89% white teachers' BHM instruction in K-12 schools provides opportunities for further research. As King & Brown (2014) suggested, Black History Month pedagogies require more attention, and a "concerted, collective approach to continued education of communities both in and out of schools" (King & Brown, 2014, p.7).

If we seek a future of liberatory BHM instruction, all stakeholders must have the opportunity to reflect, study, and discuss the histories of Black lives in the past and present both in the United States, and across the diaspora. If we are to understand the current realities of our communities and country as a whole, the intricate connections to our collective past must first be explored. To that end, I envision a comprehensive BHM research agenda where BHM instructional practice is analyzed across the United States in multiple schools and communities. In such an endeavor, researchers and teachers collaborate to study BHM instruction in systems at all instructional levels, while further assessing instructional materials, and (most importantly) student outcomes and affect.[74]

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[73] The liberatory BHM framework was developed especially for this study, in answer to calls from researchers such as King & Brown (2014), and Dagbovie (2018), who suggest that Black History instruction must be viewed through a Black epistemic lens (King & Brown, 2014; King 2018; Dagbovie, 2018).

[74] Once such avenue may be through collaboration with The Carter Center for K-12 Black History Education. I am inspired and emboldened by the researchers and colleagues at the Carter Center, and hope to connect my BHM research to the wider Black History Education consortium.

Future research may consider the barriers experienced by educators in Rolling Oaks as they point to systemic and individual concerns including fear, BHM teacher efficacy, and systems of support. These concerns would benefit from continued observation, analysis, and remediation through integration of content, consciousness, and cultural measures. Finally, until we understand what is happening in schools *now* during BHM, we cannot provide effective mediation or collaborate to improve BHM outcomes. I urge scholars and practitioners to team and up and continue this work, together, so that research may impact instruction, and vice versa.

Final Thoughts

I began this study as a white teacher reflecting on and exploring the complexities of BHM instruction in one suburban district. It started as a curiosity, and a quest to answer my colleague's question, "why don't we have a white history month?" I hoped to come away with some recommendations to improve K-5 lessons, and find out more about Black History in the process. Instead, I've come out the other side with an appreciation for just how little I know about the history of America, and the wealth of hierarchical systems built to subvert the progress of Black folks in my community, my state, and across our country.

In the interviews for this study, I was humbled by the generosity of my peers, by their willingness to engage in conversations about their practice, their positionality, and a future where instruction would more fully encompass the beauty, pain, and resilience of Black History. In many ways, this dissertation confirmed my suspicion that the majority white teachers of the Rolling Oaks' school district were providing BHM instruction that allowed Eurocentric ideals and the fear of the "reality" of American history to cloud their instruction (confirmed in 7/12 cases where teachers are approaching or "not yet" meeting liberatory instructional practices). I was not prepared however, for the manner in which teachers *do* provide liberatory BHM

instruction. Rolling Oaks teachers' practices were far more complex and intricately bound to each participants' identity than I originally anticipated. The teachers who were able to engage in liberatory BHM instruction were teachers who spoke at length about their work with race, equity, and inclusion. They outlined moments in their lives that were essential towards changing their outlook on systems of power, be they educational, or part of the wider societal context. I believe that these teachers' self-reflection proved the most significant factor in their ability to provide liberating Black History instruction.

Witnessing these realizations, and learning from BHM (and Black History) research taught me BHM instruction must go beyond ideas of liberatory praxis in *curriculum.* I (and my Rolling Oaks' colleagues) must stop expecting improved BHM instruction to be something that is as simple as facilitating a curricular change, or a resource provided on cue. I must instead acknowledge that liberatory, humanizing BHM practices in the vein of Dr. Woodson's vision will require personal, local, and institutional shifts in practice. It will take a movement, a groundswell of educators committed to seeking truth in a nation centuries into obfuscation. Only after approaching the painful realities of our nation can we begin to provide a more holistic future that speaks to the histories and humanity of all our students. Liberatory BHM instruction requires a personal commitment to learning, not only about oneself, but about the difficult histories that have created a system where white-supremacist educational practices are both permitted and revered.

I wonder: How can teachers provide a liberating experience of BHM? I believe we can let go of what we "know" to be true, and humble ourselves, regardless of where on the continuum of liberatory BHM instruction we fall. Instead, we can marvel in awe at this country, at this world we live in, and see it for what it is, a flawed and violent representation of American History that

we must navigate along with our students. We can commit to make mistakes, to encourage students' critical assessment of this reality, to "get in trouble," and "do it wrong," by sharing a history of our nation that includes the liberation of Black bodies, minds, and souls from the layers of miseducation levied upon us all. For only in this vulnerability (an asset so graciously exhibited by all of the interview participants), will we come to know ourselves in the full context of these United States. In this process, this search for liberation, it will *not* be the adults that will lead the way. Instead, we may be led by the voices and ideas of our students. The students know what to ask for. They have experienced the pain of Eurocentrically informed celebrations of Black History, limiting their observance to recognition of Black History as only present in enslavement, civil rights, and Jim Crow (King, 2018; Rolling Oaks' students, November, 2019). I hope we have the courage to listen.

Afterward: "Our Voices Will be Heard"

Marching down main street, the 150 students linked arms. Some were chanting for change, others held signs with bold letters stating, "Our voices will be heard," "Black Pride, NOT Black face," and finally "We were more than slaves, we ARE SCHOLARS." These majority Black middle and high school students were marching towards an audience with district officials, their walkout, staged in request of improved instruction that acknowledges the racial dynamics in their schools.

In the suburb of Rolling Oaks Wisconsin, this protest came only days after a highly publicized blackface incident at a home basketball game.[75] When the white student wearing blackface was disciplined by the district, it incited a backlash from the community's majority white students (62%) many of whom came to their peer's defense.[76] Viral posts on Facebook and Snapchat quickly publicized hate speech from white students, and more shockingly, from adults in the community. These responses laid bare the traumas caused by such historically degrading events.

In response, at both the middle and high school levels, students from Rolling Oaks' Black Student Union (BSU), and Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) joined together, to develop a plan for response. These student-organized clubs routinely provide a space for minority students and their peers to gather, to advocate for change, and to support community needs through service. In this instance, finding their community's historical knowledge required

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[75] A white student painted his face black and at a home basketball game. The student was asked by peers to remove the face paint, and informed of the terrible history of Blackface as a form of degradation. The school district took action, removing the student from the game, and sending a letter home to all district parents and students. This incident, although shocking, is not a rarity, other recent high school blackface events include a teacher in blackface for Halloween, students mocking a basketball player with images of blackface, and news coverage of viral posts of students in blackface. (Stewart, 2019; Hobbs, 2019; Fortin, 2019; Ellis, 2019).

[76] Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, DPI, 2019

attention, it was here that the idea to walk out of school in peaceful protest was born. After informing their teachers and principals of their intent, the students left class mid-day on a Tuesday, making the one mile walk down the main street to Rolling Oaks' district offices.

As they walked they chanted, "What do we want. . . CHANGE. . . When do we want it . . NOW!" mirroring the calls of civil rights activists from the 1960's. Local news reporters followed, memorializing their call.

When they arrived at the district support center, student representatives spoke to a packed community room. Parents, community members, school board officials, and district brass listened as the students raised the issues plaguing their school and community. The students asked for a commitment to change, as they entreated leadership to answer their three demands:

1. Reimagine Rolling Oaks' K-12 curriculum to include Black History beyond stories of enslavement and civil rights.
2. Commit to hire and retain more African American and racially conscious teachers.
3. Create and review district policies that address racism in schools.

When they'd shared their requests, the students left the building, just as they came. They returned to school, and walked back to class in a similarly peaceful fashion, having shared their requests, and hoping their voices had been heard. (Pitts, Field Notes, November, 2019)

Appendices:

Appendix A: Survey:

A.1 QR Code Flyer

REMEMBER LEARNING ABOUT

?

Participate in a University of Wisconsin Department of Curriculum and Instruction Research Project

SCAN HERE AND SHARE:

A.2 Educator Survey:

1. I am a __ _____ (grade level) teacher at _____ school.
2. I teach Black History (Y/N)
3. Topics I cover during Black History Month. . . (Please share any people, events, or topics you focus on, including curricular resources.)
4. Please share any additional thoughts you have about Black History Month - including ways you'd like the school & district to support your work in the classroom or school.

5. I feel adequately prepared to teach Black History.
6. OPTIONAL: I would be willing to participate in a brief interview about my teaching and experience around Black History Month. Please provide your name and email address:

A.3 Black History Month Teacher Interview Consent Form

Black History Month in Suburban Schools

Teacher and Community Member Interviews

Research Participant Information and Consent Form: Semi-Structured Interviews and Observations

A University of Wisconsin Department of C&I Research Study

Principal Investigator: Carl Grant, Primary Researcher: Brianne Pitts

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH:

You are invited to take part in a research study about your experience of teaching, learning or experiencing Black History and Black History Month in Rolling Oaks Wisconsin. You have been asked to participate because you indicated interest in a short interview with University of Wisconsin Madison Department of Curriculum and Instruction student Brianne Pitts, who is conducting this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore patterns in teaching and learning about Black History in and around Black History Month. The study will include teachers, parents, students and community members in and the Rolling Oaks School district. This project will involve interviews with participants as well as observation in willing participant classrooms.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

When you consent, you will be asked to participate in a short, semi-structured interview with the researcher, by phone or in person. Questions will revolve around your experience as a student, parent, or community member in the town of Rolling Oaks.

If at the conclusion of the interview you would like to continue the conversation or allow access to your classroom for observation, additional time will be scheduled at your convenience. In-class observations at times and hours of teacher's discretion, with interview to follow. Approximate time per interview 15-45 minutes,

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

While themes that arise in earlier interviews may be referenced in later interviews, personal information will be obscured. When responding to questions and topics, you can opt-out of any part of the project or choose not to answer at any time. Although pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process, the risk that you may be identified through association with the researcher remains. There is always the possibility that through this connection, the identities of research participants may become public. Several precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening. Names of people and places will be changed in transcripts and other data by the researcher as the data is collected.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

Although there are no direct benefits for participating in this study, findings will be used to direct professional development sessions for SPASD staff. Results will help SPASD to identify areas of strength and areas for growth in the current teaching and learning of Black History Month.

WILL THERE BE ANY COMPENSATION TO THE FAMILY/PARTICIPANT?

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used. If you participate in this study, we will quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow me to use your words in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form. There is a slight risk of a breach of confidentiality in the event of a data breach. In the case of an unanticipated problem, the study team will work with the PI and the IRB to resolve it. If through the interviews, the researcher learns about the abuse or neglect of children, I will need to reveal your identity to public officials. This is based on regulation -Executive Order 54- that requires UW employees to report learned knowledge of abuse or neglect of minors.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research, you should contact the Primary Researcher, Brianne Pitts at [redacted], or the Principal Investigator Carl Grant at 608/263-6586. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you should contact the Education Research IRB at (608) 263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study it will have no effect on any services, grades, evaluations or treatment you are currently receiving, Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about this research and voluntarily consent to participate.

Name of ADULT participant (please print)

_____

Signature _____

Date:_____

Please initial below:

_____I give my permission to be audiotaped

_____ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications or presentations without using my name.

_____ I give my permission to have photographs of BHM artifacts I provide published in this study.

Appendix B: Survey Results:

The following table provides a list of the TOTAL subjects/topics and number of responses each subject/topic received in BHM survey (in Appendix A).

Table B.1 Teacher Identified Subjects Addressed During Black History Month

Table B.1 Key	20 +	5 +	- 5

Subject /Topic	Responses	Subject /Topic	Responses
"All culture including poverty"	1	Brain Pop	2
"Oscar white"	1	Brown vs. Board of Education	2
"The Help"	2	Bus Boycott	3
13th-15th Amendments	1	Carter G. Woodson	2
40 people murdered during the Civil Rights Movement	1	Change over time	1
A Philip Randolph	2	Children of the Civil Rights Movement	1
Abe Lincoln	2	Chinua Achebe	1
Abolitionists	1	Civil Rights	31
Activists	1	Civil Rights Acts	1
Afeni Shakur	1	Civil War	3
African American Figures	1	Colin Kaepernick	2
African American in FDR's Government	1	Core African Americans in WWI	2
Afro-centric Screen Print	1	Coretta Scott King Awards	2
Afro-Latino history	2	Culture	2
American Revolution	1	Desegregation	1
Angela Davis	1	Discrimination	1
Anti-Lynching	1	Diverse Books	6
Apartheid	1	Donald Glover	1
Art /Artwork by Black People	3	Double V Campaign	2
Assata Shakur	1	Duke Ellington	2
Athletes	1	Edwidge Danticat	1

Biographies	5	Ella Fitzgerald	1
Black Artists	1	Eloise Greenfield	1
Black Authors	8	Emancipation	2
Black Cabinet	1	Emmett Till	1
Black History Month	1	Emory Douglas	1
Black Leaders	4	Equal Rights	1
Black Music	2	Famous African Americans	3
Black Panther Party	3	Finding your Roots (PBS)	1
Black Lives Matter	9	Follow the Drinking Gourd	2
Blood Transfusions	1	Frederick Douglass	3
Blues	1	Freedman	1
Bobby Seale	1	Freedom Songs	2
Booker T Washington	7	Garrett Morgan	1
GED Study Elements	1	Little Rock 9	2
Gentrification	1	Louis Armstrong	1
George Washington Carver	3	Lynching	2
Gandhi	1	Madame C.J. Walker	1
Great Depression	5	Mae Jemison	1
Great Migration	4	Malcolm X	6
Haitian Independence	2	Mandela	1
Hank Aaron	1	March on Washington	1
Harlem Renn	2	Marcus Garvey	2
Harriet Tubman	7	Marian Anderson	1
Heroes	1	Maya Angelou	3
Hip Hop	4	Media Controlling the Narrative	1
Historical Fiction	1	Michael Jordan	2
Historically Significant African Americans	1	Michelle Obama	1
History	1	Microaggression	1
Huey Newton	1	MLK Jr.	50
Ida B. Wells	2	Modern Times	1
Ida Tarbell	1	Muhammed Ali	1
Immigration	1	Multi-racial identities	1

Income and ACT scores	1	Music	1
Influential African Americans	2	NAACP	2
Institutional Oppression	1	Nat Turner	1
Interdisciplinary Poetics	2	Nation of Islam	1
Inventions	1	Neil DeGrasse Tyson	1
Jackie Robinson	8	New Deal	2
Jaqueline Woodson	1	Nikki Grimes	1
Jason Reynolds	1	None	11
Jazz	6	Obama	5
Jim Crow	1	Olympic Athletes	1
Jim Crow Laws	2	Oprah	2
John Henry	1	Patrisse Khan Cullors	1
John Lewis	1	Pioneers in Sport	1
Katherine John	1	Police Shootings	1
Keep the Dream Alive	1	Presentation/Plays	2
Kehinde Wiley	1	Privilege	1
Kool Herc	1	Protests	1
Langston Hughes	1	Race	1
Racial Profiling	1	Social Darwinism	1
Racism	1	Social Justice	1
Rap	1	Sojourner Truth	2
Read your heart out	2	Spiritual Songs	2
Reconstruction	3	SSNCC	1
redlining	1	Student interests/Representation	4
Renee Watson	1	Teaching Tolerance	1
Rosa Parks	31	The constitution	2
Ruby Bridges	24	The history behind Black History	1
Scholastic News	2	The World Today/Today's Issues	6
SCLC	1	Toni Morrison	1
Scott Joplin	5	Tuskegee Airmen	2
Segregation	8	Underground Railroad	8
Segregation Laws	1	Voting Rights	1

Selma	1	W.E.B. Du Bois	7
Simone Manuel	1	White Blight/White Flight	1
Sit ins	1	William Grant Still	1
Slave Trade Route	1	Wilma Rudolph	2
Slavery	16	WWII	6

B.2. Materials

These materials were created by the researcher as a method of engagement for teachers in researching folks outside of the typical Black History Month heroes.

Padlet is a resource used to compile links to documents, websites and videos for student or teacher access. This Padlet, "Leaders in Black History" was referenced in chapter 5, (Mrs. Daniels) as an essential component of her BHM instruction in 2019. It was further referenced as a helpful material provided by the district in 2018-2019.

Leaders in Black History : https://padlet.com/brianner_pitts/Blackhistorymonth

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

2. What do you recall learning about Black History? Black History Month?

3. Why did you choose to participate in this interview? What were your motivations for participating? (Minor - - skip this)

4. What are some key ideas that stand out to you when thinking about Black History in Rolling Oaks?

5. Has teaching/learning/living Black History informed the way you think about people of color in Rolling Oaks? If so, how? If not, why not?

6. What do you see as the similarities or differences between your school experience and the school experience of your child/children? (Minor - - skip this)

7. What ideas do you have on how your school can improve the educational experiences for students of color? For all students of Black History?

8. What else would you like me to know about your experiences of Black History in Rolling Oaks?

9. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Table C. 1. Interview Participants by School and Grade

Participant	School	Grade
24	ES1	4
3	ES2	2
9	ES2	5
NA	ES3	NA
23	ES4	0
20	ES4	3
NA	ES5	NA
NA	ES6	NA
NA	ES7	NA
NA	ES8	NA
16	ES9	1
NA	MS1	NA
123	MS2	6
154	MS3	9
98	HS1	11-12
122	HS1	11-12
124	HS1	12
29	HS2	7-12
14	HS2	7-12

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