

To: Department of Education

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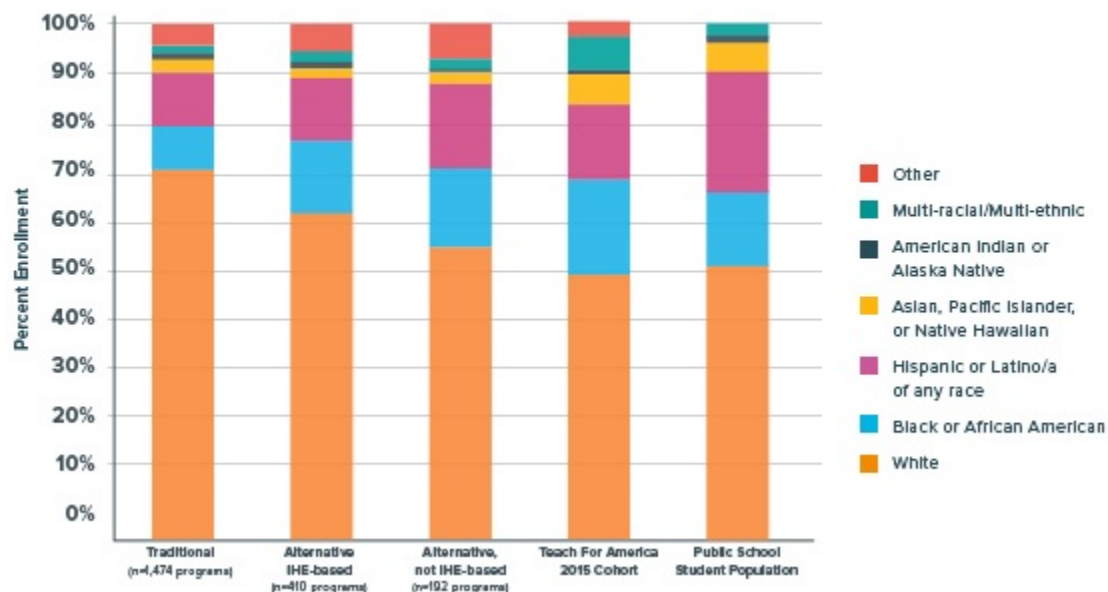
Team #: 3

Title: Integrating Diverse Perspectives into the U.S. History Curriculum

Executive Summary

In the United States, history is taught in a Eurocentric viewpoint that doesn't reflect the perspectives of the many diverse individuals in our nation.³ Students learn a limited, biased, and repetitive version that doesn't express the necessary nuances.⁴ Experts in BIPOC history will be able to lead the way towards developing a curriculum that is more representative of the general population. In doing so, history will teach students to be culturally aware, empathetic human beings that are ready to collaborate in a global society.

Racial and Ethnic Representation by Program Type



"Racial and Ethnic Representation by Program Type." *Teach for America*, www.teachforamerica.org/.

Background

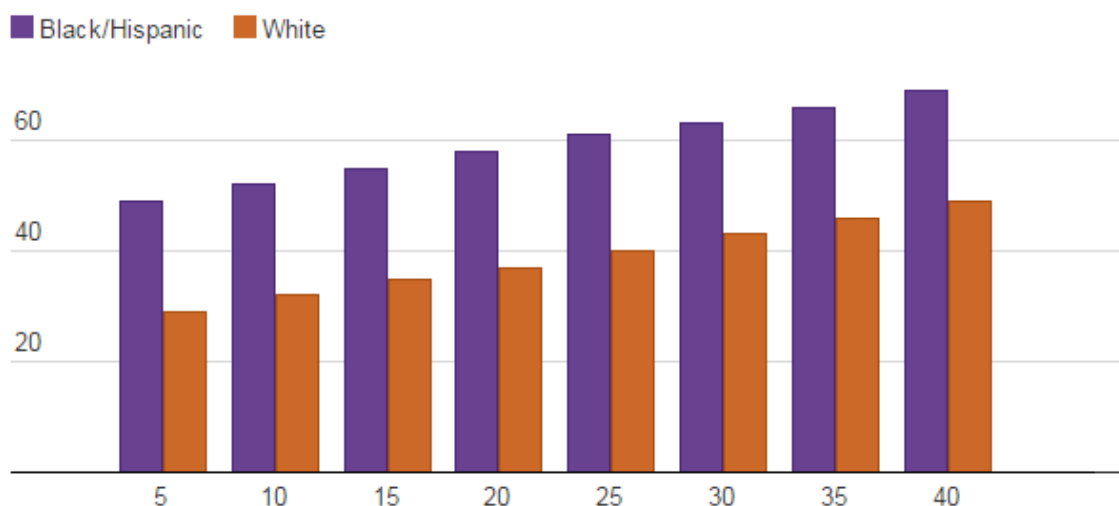
Consistently regarded as a 'melting pot' of cultures, the United States houses citizens from a wide range of backgrounds. Unfortunately, the history taught in public education doesn't reflect that. Currently, U.S. History is taught in a biased, Eurocentric lens that leaves little room for conveying global perspectives.⁴ Figures such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are revered with little regard for the nuances that come with systematic oppression. (george washington) In contrast, only 9 percent of history class time is dedicated to the teaching of Black History.² This minimal statistic is seen across the board for many minority populations.

Students, especially those from minority backgrounds, are taught a narrative that praises the status quo, excluding the heritage and history of BIPOC individuals.

Even when it is discussed, there are misconceptions present in the material. In 2015, Texas students sat in a classroom as their teacher explained the history of slavery. The words used in the given historical text and the teacher described the enslaved as “workers from Africa.”⁶ This inappropriate interpretation severely downplayed the horrors of slavery, where offhand remarks similar to this consistently affect students of color, who tend to be impacted heavily by microaggressions that demean their human experience.¹

Boys of color more likely to be imprisoned

Percent chance of imprisonment, by number of self-reported crimes committed in the past year



Many individuals grow up with the cultural trauma that stems from lack of representation, leading to them developing mental health struggles later on in life due to the vast distance between what’s presented in the media and their experiences in real life. At present, there is no federal requirement for the teaching of black history in the United States, and only a few states have curriculums that mandate such.³ In Texas, where Mexican culture is infused, the teaching of Mexican History was required starting in only 2018.⁷ The lack of common consensus on what cultures ought to be taught in schools allows states to, consciously and subconsciously, make racially biased decisions.

Furthermore, when students of color are not taught their own history, they are more likely to lose interest in the subjects taught at hand. This results in more suspensions for Black and Hispanic boys, as shown. Since there is less exposure to positive narratives of minorities, it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy in which students imitate the negative behavior they see reflected in the media, perpetuating the oppressive school-to-prison pipeline. Cultural misconceptions in the education system have real ability to harm the lives of individuals, and as such, there is a need

to replace demeaning stereotypes with diverse perspectives. Past results have shown that when students receive a culturally competent education with mentors who share a similar background, they thrive.

Reforming the current curriculum is a starting point for a culturally-aware, highly empathetic, and more accepting society. Providing a safe space for open discussion and formation of independent thought, students can form their own opinions of the world while learning to understand their peers. With this knowledge, it prepares students to be global citizens who will be able to collaborate internationally on the world's biggest issues.

Recommendation

Given the diverse narrative behind the American story, to properly represent this, it begins with creating an inclusive history curriculum. Following discussions with current educators and students, an understanding of the current curriculum, existing gaps, and biases present provide a baseline for reform. Consulting with a panel of historians, BIPOC experts, and activists, new guidelines regarding subject matter and resources can be compiled as a national standard for what students should be learning in the classroom. As time passes, new contemporary history may become of relevance to society, so the formation of a national committee to oversee the history curriculum and make necessary revisions every five years. This committee would be in direct contact with local communities of different ethnic backgrounds to assure their cultures are being accurately represented.

With this shift, it becomes vital that history teachers are given workshops on how to broach sensitive topics, while nurturing a healthy culture of discussion. They should receive guidance from experts in diverse fields of history in order to foster cultural awareness of the stories told. These workshops won't just be static, they will be interactive so that the teachers will be able to learn about and overcome their own biases. Potential training sessions include creating a lesson plan pulling from sources created from diverse sources, fostering an environment for open discussion, and overcoming internal prejudices. There will be yearly reviews on history teachers where students take an anonymous survey answering questions about whether or not they felt represented in their history class, did the teacher create an atmosphere to discuss difficult subjects, and if they feel that they have a greater understanding of other cultures/minorities than they did before. Using this feedback, teachers can improve their teaching and the results can be used at future workshops to help teachers hone their skills.

Limitations

Although this legislation will shape the history curriculum across the board, it is impossible to fit in all narratives due to sheer breadth and thus this curriculum still may exhibit some minor representation disparities. However, exposure to a wide range of figures from all sorts of backgrounds will give marginalized students the opportunity to thrive seeing role models from their culture. There is also the concern of ensuring that such legislation is implemented in schools. Creating a quantitative measure (i.e. time spent on Black history) for all minority

groups is well-intentioned, but puts restrictions on material flexibility and may make history less enjoyable. Finding a method of accountability while allowing flexibility in history classes is of prime importance. Considering the systemic oppression present in the system, it is possible that teachers will still struggle to overcome their own biases which impact the way they teach.¹ There may be backlash from parents who see no problem with the history curriculum and will protest for a return to the status quo.

Conclusion

Development of a curriculum that is inclusive and factual is the first step for greater representation in history classrooms. Considering the plethora of cultures in the United States, it is essential to cover the history of all cultures so that no student feels excluded. To progress as a society, greater empathy, inclusion, and acceptance are needed to facilitate social change.

Citations

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