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## Forgotten Histories: The Need for a Multi-Narrative Approach in Teaching Social Studies

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APPROACH IN TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES

Forgotten Histories: The Need for a Multi-Narrative Approach in Teaching Social Studies

Education

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Honors Project

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## **Abstract**

This paper discusses the idea of using a multi narrative approach to teaching social studies and focuses on a presentation meant to bring about change among teachers. The presentation used to present at the Ohio Council for Social Studies Annual Conference in October of 2020 brings this concept to the forefront and provides practical ways in which teachers can implement this approach when teaching history. A multi-narrative approach focuses on combining and using multiple sources from multiple perspectives with the intention of creating a more inclusive story of how events played out. The typical way in which history is taught is through the experiences of rich white men who were educated and could afford to write down what was happening. Over time, these experiences became the central narrative that is used when talking about history. This narrative is pervasive in the content standards for social studies and is frequently the focus of social studies curriculum. By presenting this, my goal was to inform individuals in the field of education of how to actually go about constructing a multi-narrative history with their students. This goal was successfully achieved based on feedback received and ultimately I plan on using this multi-narrative approach when I have my own classroom.

## **Project Overview**

### **Project Origins**

This project is a PowerPoint presentation that was given at the Ohio Council for Social Studies Annual Conference in October 2020 in a virtual way. This project is the culmination of research, experiences, and a desire to change the future of social studies. The whole idea of this started after reading Jeanne Theoharis' *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History*. This book provides a completely new perspective to what most middle and high school students are taught in school and I found this to be such a surprise. This led me down a path of questioning, do I really know how things in history happened? From here I was introduced to the concept of the "main historical narrative" in a Women's history class at BGSU. This idea states that when you notice who has had the power, who has had the ability to be educated, and who has had the money for the longest time, these people are the ones that have been able to shape the historical narrative. In the context of the United States, wealthy white men have been in positions of power the longest, have had the most opportunities to be educated, and have had the money to buy supplies to write down what they're seeing. This is where the historical narrative is born. During this Women's history class we were focusing on this idea of going away from the main historical narrative, constructed by rich white men, and instead going towards a multi-narrative approach to history. This approach requires individuals to ask questions of what they're reading, viewing, learning, and seek to understand whose perspective is not included. From there, there is an effort to obtain materials written or depicting others whose perspective is missing from the original work. Then once multiple sources of information have been collected, individuals need to analyze each of the sources asking questions such as;

what is this source's version of this story/event? It is from these experiences that started my path towards what would become my honors project.

### **Initial Research Question and Process of Research**

My first research question for this project originated from those experiences mentioned previously. I start my initial research question by asking; why is typically only one version of history taught in middle/high school social studies classes, when students are taught from a young age that there are at least two sides to every story? From here I went on to research this and the idea of a single narrative. The research can be summed up well from the article, *Race, Memory and Master Narratives: A Critical Essay on U.S. Curriculum History*, "...both of us have been struck by what appears to be the predominance of whiteness at the center of the narrative arc of the foundations of curriculum studies, as presented through synoptic texts and edited collections" (Brown & Au, 2014). What they're saying is that when looking at the curriculum, there is a pattern that emerges of having a focus on whiteness. In saying this, that means that the main narrative that is portrayed through curriculum is one which shows white people and their experiences. However, it is well known that there are more racial groups in the classroom than just White/Caucasian. The National Center for Education Statistics says that in 2017 the percentage distribution of students in public school based on race/ethnicity was, "48% White, 15% Black, 27% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 1% American Indian/ Alaska Native, and 4% two or more races" (NCES 2020). This clearly shows that the average student makeup of a classroom includes more than just white students, but the main narrative focuses solely on the white perspective. This research led me to ask more questions, this time involving some sort of action on my behalf.

### **Secondary Research Question and Process of Presentation**

My second research question asks; how can I inform and encourage other teachers to adopt a multi-narrative approach to teaching social studies? I decided that the best way to do this would be presenting at a conference for educators. I started applying to the National Council for Social Studies conference in Washington, D.C. and also the Ohio Council for Social Studies conference. I was not accepted for the national conference, but the Ohio conference welcomed me to present on this topic. My presentation focused on the ways in which this multi-narrative approach can actually be implemented when teaching vs just instructing people on why we should use this approach. I had seen many others present on why this approach is helpful, but none on how to actually do it. I saw this need for providing a solution to the problem of the single narrative, and with this presentation my intention was to answer that and show the actual implementation of this process. The conference ended up turning into a virtual only event and the recording of my submission can be watched at the end of this paper on YouTube. At this conference, teachers, pre-service teachers, and any other individuals who were involved with the Ohio Council for Social Studies were able to view this presentation. Based on verbal feedback I received from peers who watched my presentation at the conference, they seemed to find it helpful and relevant.

### **Reasons for Project**

The main reason I chose to do this project is because I saw this topic as something that was lacking from the conversation that educators would frequently have with each other about curriculum and the future of education as a whole. I think having a multi-narrative approach to history is important because it not only brings exposure to other groups along with stories and narratives that have been forgotten or purposely omitted, but it also teaches students critical

thinking skills. Critical thinking skills such as, analyzing sources, interpreting and understanding the biases that may be present in a source, and from these sources then being able to formulate their own conclusion about what specifically happened. These are all very important skills that are needed in the 21st century, and appear to be a skill students and adults are lacking with the rise of false information being widely spread as the truth. As an educator, to not prepare our students to face this world is a great injustice to them and goes against what the role of a teacher is. This approach to teaching social studies education integrates critical thinking in a seamless manner. By using a multi-narrative approach when teaching social studies, the students and the teacher will be formulating knowledge together and creating a joint learning process where all involved are engaged in learning and correcting previous notions held. This process by nature invokes questions and promotes questioning skills, which is something that is required for success in the world today and likely will be even more important in the future.

### **Self-Assessment**

#### **Areas for Improvement**

One of the shortcomings with my presentation is that I was only able to present at a conference intended for educators within Ohio. My initial goal was to present at the National Council for Social Studies conference in Washington DC, however I was not selected for this and instead set my sights on the OCSS conference. Despite being only able to present to Ohioans, I think that this presentation is something that many teachers need to view and understand the importance and relevance of the multi-narrative approach to teaching social studies, in addition to how to actually implement these ideas and strategies put forth in my forgotten histories presentation. Another shortcoming with this situation is that the conference was entirely virtual, in that people could select to watch a video at any time, and therefore only

people actually interested in this topic would receive exposure to it. This therefore does not include main groups that likely would need this information or could be extremely relevant and helpful to changing their mindset and viewpoint on educational practices.

### **Future Implications**

There are many ideas from this project that I plan to carry forth with me as a future educator and into my life. One of the biggest things I have learned from this is that history is constantly happening, it's an ongoing process, and those in power typically get to write the book how they see fit. But as a teacher, it is important to make sure that my students are exposed to more than just the main idea of how things happened, this main narrative of the book. Those details and side stories with alternative perspectives help to create a fuller meaning and understanding of what exactly happened. It has brought me much awareness on how little of history I was actually taught in elementary, middle, and high school. I was taught one version of history and this no-longer satisfies me. As a future educator, I plan on having my students analyze multiple sources against each other, often with conflicting ideas or perspectives as a way to prepare them for the needs and demands of living in the 21st century. Additionally, from this project I have learned that although I am one person I can have a greater impact beyond myself that can go on and inspire others to act. This research and the multi-narrative approach is something I intend to build upon as I enter my profession and continue forth with it throughout my time as a life-long educator.

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Appendix A- Presentation Recording

YouTube Link to Recorded Version of the Presentation (25:56)- <https://youtu.be/ww3sdOiVdns>

Appendix B- Copy of Presentation Slides

# FORGOTTEN HISTORIES:

The Need for a Multi-Narrative Approach in Teaching Social Studies

Presented by:  
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## LAYOUT OF PRESENTATION

1. Introduction
2. Where does the main historical narrative come from?
3. Why do the people who decide the narrative matter?
4. Why is using the multiple narrative approach in social studies important?
5. Multi-narrative history in the classroom
6. 8th grade content statements that work
7. High School American history content statements that work
8. Examples of Forgotten Histories
9. Referen

## INTRODUCTION



- Senior at Bowling Green State University
- From Aurora, OH (near Kent State)
- World Traveler
- Became interested in this topic 1 yr ago
  - Women's History
  - Jeanne Theoharis's *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*




## WHERE DOES THIS MAIN NARRATIVE OF HISTORY COME FROM? WHO DECIDES?

"History is written by the victors" - Winston Churchill

"What is history but a fable agreed upon?" - Napoleon Bonaparte

"The very ink with which history is written is fluid prejudice" - Mark Twain

**Ask yourself:**

- Who has the ability to read and write for the longest time?
- Who makes up the majority in this group of readers and writers?
- Who has had the ability to pursue education and scholarship for the longest time?



Image Source: <https://www.globalresearch.ca/civilization-barbarism-the-white-mans-burden-1898-1902/5461424?print=1>

## WHY DOES WHO DECIDES THE NARRATIVE MATTER?

- Perspectives can be left out
- "Our critical review found that certain histories, authors, and ideas were almost completely absent or hardly acknowledged" (Brown & Au 2014)
- How a victor tells a story vs how the defeated tell it

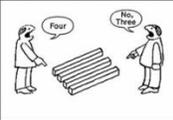


Image Source: <https://medium.com/@sokolomes/more-on-diversity-1b0992ae854>

## WHY IS USING MULTIPLE NARRATIVES IMPORTANT IN SOCIAL STUDIES?

- Students synthesizing information
- Informs students of another POV
- Learn critical thinking skills
- "Historical understanding requires recognizing this multiplicity of points of view in the past, which makes it important to seek out a range of sources on any historical question rather than simply use those that are easiest to find" (COLLEGE, CAREER & CIVIC LIFE C3 FRAMEWORK 2013)



Image Source: [https://www.iconfinder.com/icons/320264/brain\\_hospital\\_neurology\\_icon](https://www.iconfinder.com/icons/320264/brain_hospital_neurology_icon)

## WHAT DOES MULTI-NARRATIVE HISTORY LOOK LIKE?

- "...requires incorporating source materials that reflect different views of a historical event" (*Multiperspectivity: What is It, and Why Use It?*)
  - Gallery Walk
  - Simulation
  - Source Analysis
  - Personal Reflection





Image Sources: <https://www.vetizon.com/about/our-company/fourth-industrial-revolution/how-virtual-reality-changing-world-content-design>, <https://images.apo.gov/su/25mTLiMcUleE9>, <https://www.mindandteaching.org/new-blog/2016/9/18/best-practices-the-gallery-walk>

## OHIO CS TO CONSIDER & QUESTIONS TO ASK

**8th Grade**

- CS 1 about interpreting sources
- CS 4 about slaves- what was life like for them in Africa?
- CS 11 about natives- what about native women?
- CS 18 about bias, stereotype and racial ideas- where did these come from? Who made these a thing?



Image Source: <http://citronpropebrenny.com/events-1/ohio-seminar-the-rise-and-fall-of-the-american-republic>

### OHIO CS TO CONSIDER & QUESTIONS TO ASK



#### US History Strand

- CS 11- Reservation life then vs now? What was the origin of them?
- CS 16- anti-immigrant and racial intolerance during this time? What was done?
- CS 17- Improved standard of living for whom? Everyone?
- CS 21- why were the minority so helpful?
- CS 27- How were the immigrant and minority lives supposed to get better? Did they actually?
- CS 29- 1965 immigration act did what for which groups of people? Who felt this way? How did immigrants feel?



### EXAMPLES OF “FORGOTTEN HISTORIES”



- Black Wall Street
- Tulsa Race Massacre
- Wilmington Coup D'etat
- Negro Silent Protest Parade
- Armenian Genocide
- 1943 Detroit Race Riots
- SNCC
- Black Panther Party's Community Outreach programs
- Japanese Internment Camps
- Thomasine)- Genderfluid person in Puritan society
- Alms-houses for the poor, women, and disabled
- Perspectives of Female nurses in Vietnam
- Massacre at Gnadenhutten/ Moravian Massacre
- Blood Quota for Native American Status
- Native American Boarding Schools
- Lakota Massacre

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