This paper proposes that as a way to broaden the theoretical and historical context of social studies foundational literature and curriculum history, attention must be given to issues of race and racism related the experiences of African Americans. First, race and racism should be used as an analytical tool to examine longstanding foundations topics. Second, historically marginalized social studies scholars need to be recognized and theoretically situated within the existing literature of social studies foundations. Last, there must be comparative work that examines African American and White progressives’ similar and divergent conceptions of K-12 social studies curriculum. As a way to address these limitations in the social studies foundations literature, this paper provides a comparative examination of the different ways in which Harold O. Rugg and Carter G. Woodson rendered race and racism in the textbooks they authored during the early twentieth century. This article concludes with a discussion about the implications of this study to social studies foundations scholarship.

Introduction

In the fall 2009 special edition of Theory and Research in Social Education (TRSE), social studies scholar Christine Woyschner challenged the field of social studies foundations to expand on its historiography on the important aspects that led to the theoretical and practical components of social studies education. In her view, the social studies foundation research agenda has been dominated by three interpretive frameworks: the progressive era analysis, history vs. social studies debates, and biographies of “old masters” of the field (p. 428). In agreement
with Professor Woyshner, we propose that it is time for the field to explore new research questions that challenge these traditional approaches to social studies historiography. Much work is needed, however, to revisit these traditional topics and examine their limitations, especially with regards to the racial structures so prevalent in segregated educational communities in the early 20th century.

The purpose of this manuscript is to broaden the intellectual and historical context of social studies foundational literature and curriculum history on three highly important but overlooked areas of social studies foundations. First, there is a need to attend to race and racism as an analytical tool to examine longstanding social studies foundations topics. Second, the literature needs to theoretically situate individuals neglected in social studies foundations scholarship. Last, the field of social studies foundations needs to explore comparisons that highlight the similar and different ways in which African American and White progressives addressed curricular issues during the same historical period (Watkins, 2006). As a way to address these limitations in the social studies foundations literature, this paper provides a comparative examination of the different ways in which Harold O. Rugg and Carter G. Woodson rendered race and racism in the textbooks they authored during the early twentieth century.

Drawing from the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003) and revisionist ontology (Mills, 1995), we examine Rugg and Woodson’s social studies textbooks, specifically noting the ways the narrative of African Americans are depicted in each text. We understand that investigations of the limitations of narratives of African American history in social studies and history textbooks is not a new phenomenon (Alridge, 2006; Banks, 1969; Brown & Brown 2010; Loewen, 2007; Nash, Crabtree & Dunn, 1997), however, attention paid to the way in which Rugg and Woodson characterized African Americans in history has not been thoroughly explored in social studies literature.

It is important to examine the works of Harold O. Rugg and Carter G. Woodson because they both represent a segment of the academic community during the early years of the 20th century that attempted to define and/or reconstruct social studies curriculum. Rugg’s curriculum was intended to help expand and transform democratic principles by highlighting the “American Problem” within classroom spaces (Evans, 2007). Woodson, although not traditionally considered a social studies theorist or reformist, is instrumental for social studies scholars to study because of his interdisciplinary focus on the study of African Americans in U.S history and African Diaspora topics through World history (King, Crowley, & Brown, 2010).

We note for instance, that Rugg’s textbooks portrayed African Americans as insignificant to global histories as well as portrayed African Americans as the
stereotypical “happy slave” and as helpless and naive historical actors during Reconstruction. Despite Rugg’s “progressive” label, the historical narratives in his textbooks regarding African Americans mirrored many of the stereotypical depictions of African Americans found in mainstream textbooks of the early twentieth century (Phillips, 1916; Reddick, 1934).

By way of comparison, Carter G. Woodson sought to dispel popular ideologies and characterizations of African Americans. Carter G. Woodson is considered one of the forefathers of the Black history movement (Banks, 1992; Dagbovie, 2010; Meier & Rudwick, 1986). We examine Woodson’s textbook narratives not as a process of recognition of historical African American characters, but as an effort to repudiate the racist syllogisms created by early White educators. In other words, we posit that Woodson’s work was not only responding to the revision of historical narratives, but his project was also committed to the revision of larger racial ontological meanings of African Americans within the public imagination (Brown, 2010).

We begin our manuscript by highlighting the research on Rugg and Woodson, giving specific attention to how both scholars are characterized in the academic community. Second, we provide a literature review about how race and social studies foundations are situated within the field. Third, we then lay out the theoretical frameworks that guided our analysis, which are critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2003) and revisionist ontology (Mills, 1998). Fourth, we provide a historical context of the “American problem” that was prevalent throughout the early twentieth century.

Next, we draw from our ideas regarding Rugg’s and Woodson’s conceptions about African Americans in textbooks. This article concludes with a discussion about the implications of this study to social studies foundations scholarship.

Harold O. Rugg

Scholarship on Rugg has received significant attention through the various disciplines of social studies (Evans 2007; Riley and Brown 2004; Whelan 1991), curriculum studies (Pinar, et al. 2000; Rosario, 1979; 1988; Schwartz, 1979; Watkins, 2006) and educational history (Nash, 1995; Goodenow, 1975). A renowned educator and one time leading textbook writer, research on Rugg has explained in detail his social studies contributions (Carobone, 1971, 1977; Evan, 2007, Mraz, 2004; Stern & Riley, 2001), pedagogical beliefs and theories (Boyle-Baise & Goodwin, 2009b; Nelson, 1977, 1978), curriculum and textbooks (Bisland, 2010; Boyle-Baise and Goodwin, 2009a) and controversial status (Evans, 2004, 2006). Simply put, Rugg is considered a “giant” of social studies and curriculum scholars, particularly his ideas regarding the advent of social studies and how the subject is implemented in classrooms.

Rugg is credited in some scholarly circles as one of the founders of what we know as the social studies field (Evans, 2007). He proposed that one general
course of social studies rather than separate courses such as history, geography and civics was needed to understand life and how it came to be. His social studies curriculum is lauded as revolutionary for its time and relevant to contemporary social studies practice. Instead of approaching the subject as decontextualized rote memorizations of facts, Rugg proposed a curriculum centered on the troubles of society. His focus on issue-centered curriculum, which approached the study of social studies, sought “to prepare students to participate in life activities and equip them to be constructively critical of contemporary society” (Evans, 2007 p. 40).

Rugg boasted an impressive body of scholarship. Among the most noted consisted of his textbook series titled Man and His Changing Society which included An Introduction to America Civilization (1929), Changing Civilization in the Modern World (1930a), A History of American Civilization: Economic and Social (1930b), A History of American Government and Culture (1931), An Introduction to the Problems of American Culture (1931) and Changing Governments and Changing Cultures (1932). The goal of these textbooks was to present students with evidence of salient issues and problems that underlie an American democracy. Evans (2007) states that the curriculum would help students review the “evidence which is necessary for the consideration of all aspects of a given problem and would entail “an unpartisan, open minded review of the evidence on both sides” of the question (p. 41).

There however, were some glaring omissions to Rugg’s issue-centered approach in the social studies, despite his attention to immigration and other societal concerns, his texts tended to give only surface attention or completely overlook the racial atrocities against Black Americans such as lynching, race riots, eugenics and Jim Crow laws (Gilje, 1996; Goldsby, 2006; Gould, 1999). If Rugg’s curriculum and textbooks were designed to approach critical issues within American democracy, the exclusion of race is a direct oversight of the atrocious and salient racial events that troubled social equality. It is our view that social studies and curriculum foundations scholars have neglected to investigate racial issues and how curriculum writers explored ways to alleviate it through curriculum. Moreover, social studies and curriculum studies scholars’ attention to White progressives/social reconstructionist scholars has not provided guidance on the issues of race and racism addressed during this period.

**Carter G. Woodson**

Carter G. Woodson is widely known mostly as a historian who set out to legitimatize the historical traditions of people of African descent. The writings about Woodson has centered on his critique about limited history curriculum that has disregarded African Americans as viable historical characters. His most famous and widely cited work, The Miseducation of the Negro, is lauded as a literary classic (Banks, 1992). Throughout the book, Woodson focused his
writings on the problems facing African American education, with one being the lack of knowledge about Black history. Woodson believed that with increased knowledge about Black history one could eliminate racist thoughts and perceptions that many persons (both White and Black) internalized against African Americans.

Woodson’s plight as an educator and textbook writer is a much underdeveloped and consequently underappreciated topic within education and history literature. It could be argued that he was the most prominent Black textbook writer of this period. Before his death in 1950, he would have written over 20 books, which included the following six resources in this manuscript: *The Negro in Our History* (1922), *Negro Makers of History* (1928b), *The Story of the Negro Retold* (1935), *The African Background Outlined* (1936), *African Heroes and Heroines* (1939) and *African Myths, Together with Proverbs* (1928a).

Central to Woodson’s project was to invalidate the existing axiom of historical thought found in the school curriculum about African Americans. Woodson emphasized that everything in the curriculum from the textual writing to the aesthetics of the Black citizen could be internalized and create a dangerous racial schema (Fanon, 1967) that would also develop amongst White citizens about African Americans. He further maintained that the mayhem that occurred from racial bigotry was a direct outcome from traditional education (Woodson, 1933, p.3). To correct the racial problem was to provide students, both Black and White, a counter curriculum that spoke directly to the popular discourses about the inferior nature of African Americans.

**Race and Social Studies Foundations**

A relatively young field, social studies foundational literature has encompassed a diverse set of issues and topics concerning its beginnings. Every major social studies research journal has had special editions that have contributed to the field’s foundational knowledge. The majority of the foundational literature, however, has catered to familiar narratives which center on the origins of the field of social studies (Bohan, 2003; Keels, 1988; Saxe, 1991), theoretical and practical definitions of social studies (Brady, 1993; Davis, 1993; Watras, 2004; Wilson, 1982) and on the Old Masters and Founders of the field (Evans, 2007; Fallance, 2009; Keels, 1994; Lybarger, 1983; Whelan, 1994). Traditional social studies foundations research has not thoroughly explored the racial dimensions in social studies though, although, the writings imply that race and racism of Black Americans in social studies foundations existed and was problematic to its creation. Social studies scholars agree that the conceptual development of social studies had negative racial undertones especially expressed through Thomas Jesse Jones’ social studies curriculum (Dilworth, 2004; Kliebard, 1994; Saxe, 1991; Watkins, 1990, 1991). Lybarger
(1983), for example, suggested that Jones wrote about the importance of manual training for Black children but believed that democratic forms of education was out of the intellectual scope for African American school children. Saxe (1991) notes the contradictions of Jones’s social studies program as repressive to minorities through the Hampton curriculum by abiding to the status quo of political disenfranchisement, social degradation, and economic servitude.

Although these negative racial beginnings are accepted axioms in the scholarly community, little foundational research has moved the field to explore the implications of these racist beginnings. While the U.S was inundated within the confines of Jim Crow and other institutional barriers that prevented an inclusive educational curriculum, the literature is incomplete on how social studies was theorized within ethnically and culturally diverse communities. Understanding the racial dynamics during the early twentieth century has not led many in the social studies foundations community to explore specifically issues related to race and racism directed toward African Americans. Simply put, social studies historiography has been slow to recognize the racial foundations of social studies within African American communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Howard, 2004; Watkins, 1993, 2006).

There has been research literature throughout the general social studies community that has attempted to broaden our understanding about the topic of race by explicitly uncovering the limitations of social studies curriculum and practice. These bodies of work are direct responses to the glaring absence of race and racism in the field of social studies research, curriculum, and teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2003). Investigations regarding the issues of race in the curriculum (Brown & Brown, 2010; Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995; Nelson & Pang, 2006; Rains, 2006), students’ and teachers’ perspectives on race (Cornbleth, 2002; Epstein, 2000, 2009; Urietta, 2004), and teaching about race in the social studies classroom (Chandler, 2009; Howard, 2003, 2004; Tyson, 2003) have been the focal points of many social studies scholars.

Chandler (2010) and Lintner (2004), have extended the conversations on critical race theory as a useful theoretical framework to challenge social studies educators, researchers, theorists, and practitioners to structure race-specific teaching in U.S. history classes. The fall 2004 issue of Theory and Research in Social Education, titled “Race and the Social Studies” and Critical race theory perspectives on social studies an edited book by Ladson-Billings (2003) both provide an important insights about uses of race in the social studies.

This insight, however, has not been thoroughly explicated within the foundation’s subset of social studies. There is a growing research base that has detailed African American involvement within foundational circles (Banks, 1992; Brown, 2010; Crocco, 2003; Dilworth, 2004; Howard, 2004; Grimes, 2007; King, Crowley, & Brown, 2010). These scholars’ research has been informative about the various African American individuals and communities
that have aided in the development of social studies thought. For example, Margret Crocco (2003) noted how African American scholars fought for social education “to uphold its commitment to democracy, citizenship and equal rights” (p. 112). Patrice Preston-Grimes (2007) examined the history of civic education through the perspectives of African American teachers and students. Bohan & Randolph (2009) and Bair (2009), highlighted research attending to distinctive and diverse histories of social studies education, which included articles on social studies and desegregation in Atlanta public schools (Bohan & Randolph 2009) and African American women school founders who have developed character education programs (Blair, 2009). In addition, Dilworth (2004), King, Crowley, and Brown (2010) and Brown, Crowley, and King (2011) have examined the nuanced ways in which Carter G. Woodson has contributed to social studies through citizenship education, African history, and community engagement.

**Critical Race Theory and Revisionist Ontology**

*Critical Race Theory*

The prophetic words of professor, scholar, and activist W.E.B. Dubois has rang true throughout the twentieth century when he proclaimed that the color line between Black and White citizens would be the most salient issue in society (Dubois, 1903). This sentiment can be extended to think about the historical legacy of the egregious ways in which social studies and history scholars, through textbooks and curriculum guides, have mistreated and misinformed school children about the accomplishments of African Americans. These problematic narratives still influence textbook authors’, teachers’ and students’ conceptions about African Americans (Alridge, 2006; Brown & Brown, 2010; Epstein, 2009).

As a way to underscore the salient issues about race that are ever-present in social studies thought (Ladson-Billings, 2003), some social studies scholars have used critical race theory (CRT) as a medium to explore and critique the marginalized nature the topic of race and racism has had within the field of social studies (Chandler, 2010; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Lintner, 2004; Tyson, 2003). Critical race scholars sought a theoretical framework to expose the racial inequities within the U.S legal system. CRT, currently, has expanded within the fields of education and has been used as an analytical tool for social studies scholars (Chandler, 2010; Howard, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Lintner, 2004).

Ladson-Billings (2003) states that CRT can serve as the analytical tool to explain the systemic omissions, distortions, and lies that plague the field. Howard (2004) suggested that a proper utilization of CRT would require examining the curriculum, research, theory, and practice that silence the issues of race (p. 488). These sentiments stated by Ladson-Billings and Howard align
with one of the hallmarks of CRT, historical revisionism. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) proposed that revisionist history “reexamines America’s historical record, replacing comfortable majoritarian interpretation of events with ones that square more accurately with minorities’ experiences” (p.20).

Therefore, we posit that CRT’s purpose in this study is to broaden the intellectual scope of social studies foundations and to examine longstanding issues within the field. While the literature on Rugg is expansive and he is lauded for his curriculum work and pedagogical suggestions about social studies practice, little scholarship has carefully examined his work through a racial lens. It is our purpose therefore, to reexamine Rugg’s work through an analysis of how race is rendered.

CRT also advocates for the recognition of individuals that are marginalized in discussions concerning the creation of social studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). New narratives are needed not just to recognize individuals such as Woodson as important, but to situate their work within the existing literature that highlights the diverse ways in which social studies thought and practice was conceptualized by communities of color. This directly implies that historically underserved communities played a major part in the theoretical and practical components of social studies theory.

Revisionist Ontology

Revisionist ontology is the process of reclaiming and reinventing a racial group’s identity, which has been for centuries overtly normalized by popular historical narratives (Mills, 1998). “Revision” as proposed by Mills is theoretically different from what CRT scholars would classify as “revisionist history.” The approached offered by Mills does not solely focuses on new historical narratives but also on systematically challenging categories of race normalized by racist historians. In other words, historically, the racial discourses that permeated society had a profound impact on how African Americans and other minority groups were viewed in school curriculum.

These curricula and textbooks created an image of African Americans as a race that has been naturally selected as inferior to the White race or what Mills (1998) referred to as a “sub-person”. In her exhaustive study of twentieth century textbooks, Ruth Miller Elson (1964) proclaimed that a direct correlation existed between the “darkness of color and weakness of intellect” (p. 88). The African Negro, she stated, was clearly regarded as the most degraded of the races and evidence in school textbooks solidified assumptions of African Americans incapability of improvement (p. 87). Therefore, racist beliefs that have been perpetrated in society had school curriculum and textbooks reinforce those beliefs, thus created an ontological truth about African Americans.
Black historians and educators have a long history in repudiating the racist syllogisms created by early White educators (Dagbovie, 2010; Meier & Rudwick, 1986). Since the antebellum period, many African American writers sought to reinvent the racial images of Black Americans. We employ this theory to situate the work of Carter G. Woodson as revisionist ontological work (see Brown, 2010). In other words, Woodson’s work was not only responding to the revision of historical narratives but his project was also committed to the revision of larger ontological meanings of African Americans within the public imagination. We decided to highlight Woodson because of his systemic approach to Afro-diasporic topics. He approached the study of African Americans through three initiatives: the community, colleges and universities and K-12 education through Negro History Week and school textbooks (King, Crowley, & Brown, 2010). Before we explicate on the works of Rugg and Woodson, it is important to provide the historical context on how race informed the construction of African American history in school textbooks.

Race and Society: The American Problem

The issues of race and racism within the context of African Americans’ lives was not by any stretch of the imagination an obscure American problem, if anything it was “The American Problem”—or as Gunner Myrdal (1996 [1944]) called the “American Dilemma”. Throughout this historical period, racial fear, hatred and ignorance of Black Americans spread throughout the country as evident of the rise and acceptance of White supremacy groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Sons of Confederacy. Movies such as the widely acclaimed Birth of a Nation helped validate fears and White supremacist beliefs. Children books such as Little Black Sambo, perpetrated the “pickaninny” racial stereotypes of African Americans. Advertisers exploited stereotypes of the Black body to sell its products, a process termed commodity racism (McClintock 1994). These racist depictions and organizations, along with federal and state government policies (or lack thereof) would be the catalyst for racial violence, Jim Crow segregation and Black persons’ exploitation in the justice system, which continued throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The accusations of rape of White females by Black males and the ideology of the Black male as an overhyped sexual deviant provided the excuses for the heinous act of violence by White mobs through lynching (Goldsby, 2006). As a result, there occurred a mass exodus of African Americans from southern states to northern and western states to escape the mentality of White racist southerners. Consequently, because of racist beliefs and the fight over economic and other resources, bloody and deadly confrontations between Black and White citizens occurred in northern and western cities. The Red Summer of 1919 produced twenty-six racial riots in cities and towns, resulting in major
causalities, mostly Black citizens defending themselves from White agitators.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the belief in White intellectual superiority dominated academic discourse. For example, anthropologist Samuel Morton’s craniometry studies, psychologist G. Stanley Hall’s recapitulation theory and Alfred Binet’s IQ testing were used to propel racial discourse about the physical, social and intellectual superiority of White persons (Gould, 1981). Although anthropologists, Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and sociologist Robert Park provided anti-racist work against hegemonic discourses, the eugenicist racial discourse of this time remained to have a great influence on many educational ideas including the foundational social studies of Thomas Jesse Jones. Despite the influences of pioneering literature and horrendous events concerning race and racism against Black Americans, the curriculum of the leading social reconstructionists were void or glanced over race as an important dynamic in American society that needed to be addressed. Instead, mainstream textbooks continued to construct the Black subject as inferior, history-less and negligible.

**Racialized and Propaganda Textbooks: The Lazy, Confused and Happy Negro**

Noted historian, Leon Litwack (1987), professed that no group of scholars was more deeply implicated in the mis-education of American youth and did more to shape the thinking of generations of Americans about race and Blacks than historians (p. 326). The words of popular historian Arnold Toynbee illustrated this point by stating that of all the races of human beings, only the Black race “had made no productive contribution to civilization” (cited in Winston 1975, 462). Many of the prominent historians such as David Muzzey, U.B. Phillips, Hilary Herbert and Claude Bowers accepted the inferior status of African Americans and wrote mainstream textbooks that reflected these ideas (Dubois, 1935; Nash, Crabtree and Dunn, 1997; Reddick,1934; Zimmerman, 2001). History and geography textbooks, consequently, solidified and affirmed the inferior state of African Americans.

During the early twentieth century, attention paid to African Americans in school textbooks received little to no attention. When Black Americans were presented in textbooks, the topic of slavery was the most common topic. However, slave life in these textbooks was void of the brutality of slave culture and the narrative of Black resistance. Nash, Crabtree and Dunn (1997) noted that scientific racism was prevalent in the writings of historians by explaining to schoolchildren “slavery was a blessings because it rescued Africans from eternal darkness in their savage homelands” (p. 60). Popular historian U. B. Phillips (1918) and his textbook, *American Negro Slavery*, characterized the conditions of slavery as necessary because it helped “civilize” the Black race. A textbook adopted by the American Legion in 1924 took the stance that African
Americans’ standard of living increased because of slavery (Nash, Crabtree and Dunn, 1997). Lawrence Reddick (1934) in his review of 16 state history textbooks recalled that although much of the content was diverse in nature, the common theme around slavery was one of acceptance and contentment of Blacks. For example, Thomas Marshall’s textbook, *American History* (1930), stated, “Although he was in a state of slavery, the Negro of plantation days was usually happy. He was fond of the company of others and liked to sing, dance, crack jokes, and laugh (cited in Reddick, p. 342).

Progressive educator/historian, David Muzzey’s work also adhered to the racist scientific scholarship of this time. For example, Muzzey’s textbook, *History of the American people* (1927), gave school children information that African Americans were incapable of leadership and even chastised reconstruction policies for allowing African Americans to serve as political officers (p. 408; cited in Dubois, 1935). Other textbooks lauded the efforts of the KKK and other racist organizations as saviors to the South for controlling the newly freed and savage Black man. Textbooks rarely looked upon African American historical actors that achieved prominence and helped contribute to the social, economic and political climate of the United States.

As we noted, race was an important aspect in society in the early parts of the twentieth century. Racist ideology extended from the greater society to the schoolhouse. It was evident that race was an “American problem” that needed attention within social reconstructionist thought. As a “giant” in the field of social studies and issue-centered curriculum, we ask the following questions about Rugg’s curriculum: In what ways did Rugg’s issue centered curriculum take in account the racial atrocities in American society. Did Rugg’s textbooks attempt to provide clarity to the issue of race as it pertains to African Americans? In what ways did the narratives about African Americans differ from the popular textbooks during the early part of the twentieth century? The next section, explores these questions about Rugg’s ideas concerning race and its connection with the “American problem.”

**Under Rugg’s Ideas of Race and Racism**

As a major theoretician of the social reconstruction and the social studies movement: How did Rugg’s textbooks respond to the narrative of African Americans presented by Muzzey, Phillips and Marshall? Rugg’s textbooks are in need of a closer examination about his ideas concerning the plight of African Americans during the early 20th century. A few scholars have mentioned that Rugg’s views on race, for its time, were more liberal than many of his contemporaries (Boyle- Baise & Goodman, 2009a; Evans, 2007; Goodenow 1975; Sterns & Riley, 2001). For instance, Ronald Evans (2007) examined Rugg’s earlier writings in a ninth grade pamphlet, *America and Her immigrant* (1926), “stating that he [Rugg] devoted significant space to multicultural issues
and offers a relatively forward looking treatment of those [racial] issues” (p. 70). Investigating Rugg’s pamphlets of the 1920’s, indicates his awareness of issues of race and his desire to present a critical history that questioned White hegemony. In addition, he gives an enslaved African American a voice by chronicling an interview about his experiences in slavery as well as his participation in the Underground Railroad. However, the knowledge dispersed within the framework of his pamphlets did not transfer to his textbook series, which were more influential because of the depth of readership and what propelled his popularity. Within the considerable corpus of Rugg’s scholarly work he made few pronouncements directly concerning African Americans, race and racism. The few times he attempted to discuss issues regarding African Americans, they were rather truncated or adhered to status quo historical narratives of African American history.

**Rugg’s Textbooks and African American History**

In *A History of American Civilization* (1930b), Rugg discussed the institution of slavery in a way that positioned the conditions as normal and simply an economic strategy for wealthy southern landowners. When slavery was first introduced in a paragraph in chapter four, the Africans were described as a “new source of man power” (p. 93) and in chapter seven, Rugg used the term “triangular voyage” (p.188), which was void of the egregiousness of the actual event. In addition, in a brief section on "Negro Slavery After the Revolution “(p. 259-261), Rugg outlined the spread of slavery, restrictions on slaves, and slave resistance. The section however, concludes with the phrase "many plantation-owners [who] were kind to their slaves, feeling a deep sense of responsibility for their comfort and welfare"(Rugg 1930b p. 261; cited in Nash 1995 footnotes).

This last statement regarding the practice of slavery was a common disclaimer found within K-12 and the academic historical discourse on slavery during the early part of the twentieth century. This construction of slavery suggested that many slaves lived relatively comfortable lives, as well as the belief that many slave plantations did not engage in the customary racial violence such as flogging, lynching, and rape. Rugg situated African Americans solely as slaves in this textbook excluding Black citizens’ military service in the American Revolution and Civil War. He did not write about free Black Americans in the North and after Reconstruction, African Americans were largely constructed as invisible.

In another text, *A History of American Government and Culture* (1931) Rugg answered the question: What part did the Negro play during Reconstruction in the following way?
They [black people] were like bewildered children. They had been long held in slavery and had long been denied education and political rights. It is little wonder if in their ignorance they became the tools of unscrupulous carpetbaggers and scalawag. (p. 366)

This characterization of new freedmen suggested that African Americans did not play an influential role during Reconstruction. In many ways, this statement posits that during Reconstruction African Americans had no agency towards their intellectual and social realities and were worthless or victimized historical characters that propagated the conditions of former Confederates. Rugg’s section on Reconstruction seemed to straddle the fence between acknowledging racist acts against Blacks and being apologetic to White Southerners. For instance, he mentions the KKK’s victimization of Blacks and voter disenfranchisement, but justifies the actions made by Klansmen:

The force used by the Klan was sometimes brutal and wrong, but so were the things the carpetbaggers were doing. The latter were often corrupt, and their Negro tools were, with a few exceptions, illiterate and incapable of governing. Thus the white planters, deprived of other means of protection, attempted through a secret organization to “fight fire with fire.” (Rugg, 1931 pp. 367-368)

In most of Rugg’s writings the continent of Africa was invisible or was told in relation to the colonization efforts of England, Germany, and France. As a colony of England, he acknowledged the rich resources of the continent, introduced the natives as “savage Blacks” and chronicled the White man’s exploration in the terrifying terrain. In Changing Civilizations in the Modern World (1930a), Rugg summarized in the introduction about ten countries that students will study within the pages of the text. No country in Africa was represented on the list. Moreover, in providing the explanation of why the 10 countries were to be studied, Rugg gives three reasons, which provides insight in his thoughts about people of the various African countries and their culture: 1. The countries consist of large proportions of the world population, 2. These countries include the chief races on the earth, and 3. The countries selected will play important contributions to the modern world (p. 15-16). It is clear that Rugg did not believe school children needed to understand African culture without the influences of European colonizers. To disregard African countries as significant was a major oversight because of the advancement of certain civilizations that superseded many European nations (Woodson, 1936). Again, Rugg positions Europeans as important historical subjects and Africans as insignificant actors.
The only textbook in which Rugg wrote about African American achievement was in the *An Introduction to Problems of American Culture* (1932), in the chapter, “Assimilation of Different Nationalities and Races.” The section about African Americans in this 37-page chapter involved six pages at the end of the chapter. The narrative stated that, “he [African Americans] has steadily worked his way ‘up from slavery’ and has fitted more and more surely for a place in the life of the nation (pps. 584-585). Rugg writes about educational achievements made by Black citizens, especially the contributions of Booker T. Washington and the “self supporting” (p. 585) curriculum of the Tuskegee Institute. He gives attention to Black Americans in the art by listing the works of well-known poets and authors such as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Jean Toomer. Rugg is complementary to the successes of African Americans in his short descriptions.

Rugg also acknowledged that after the Civil War, African Americans gained notoriety, had talent, and were willing to improve their way of life. However, the chapter marginalizes the contributions of African Americans by focusing much attention on the musical and artistic talents of only a few African Americans. Rugg totally ignored the achievements of African Americans in business, science, government, and the military. By highlighting educators of the Tuskegee Institute, he completely disregarded the vastly different educational philosophies offered by W.E.B. Du Bois and other African American educators and scholars (Anderson 1988). He mentions Du Bois as only a novelist without giving credence to his prolific body of scholarship.

Rugg also contradicted himself in the chapter by painting a picture that during the pre-Civil War era, “it was almost impossible to think that the Negro could ever become a creative artist” (p. 585). Then four pages later, one paragraph was devoted to Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon, both slaves, admitting that more than 30 Black Americans published poetry, essays, pamphlets and books for 100 years (p. 589). In sum, all of these examples from Rugg, presented two themes about the histories/status of African Americans, either as manipulated, malleable towards Whites and/or limited in their achievements.

The only direct address to race and racism directed toward African Americans appears after the peak of Rugg’s popularity in his text, *Social Foundations of Education* (1955), a work he co-authored with William Withers. In a chapter “Education and Minorities: Racial and Social Conflict in America” Rugg & Withers (1955) mentioned Black Americans but they were not his main thesis. Rugg briefly mentioned racial riots and outlined the various racial myths that inundated the minds of U.S. citizens, but the majority of the chapter consisted of a chronology of immigration and class conflicts. The chapter ends with suggesting that Black persons along with Catholics, Jews, and liberal-progressives were scapegoats or whipping boys of American History. Our
overall analysis is consistent with William Watkins (2006), who suggests that most of the arguments about the race and racism in the texts were superficial at best.

**Woodson’s Revisionist Ontological Textbooks**

Woodson saw his textbooks as a response to the inaccurate and racist depictions and myths concerning the image of African Americans (Goggin, 1993; Dagbovie, 2007; Meier and Rudwick, 1986; Brown, 2010; King, Crowley, & Brown, 2010). Woodson’s project was more than a text to help build the self-esteem of African American students; it was critical social commentary that called into question the existing racial discourses about the African American (Brown, 2010). Although Woodson’s textbooks would be classified as history, a close reading reveals Woodson’s interdisciplinary social studies approach to the study of African Americans. Similar to Rugg’s thoughts about proper social studies education, Woodson infused history, geography, civics, and economic concepts into his texts to help students understand and clarify the complexity of African American history and culture. The next section is an analysis of Woodson’s textbooks that responded to the dominant racial discourses of that time.

**Woodson and the Black Intellect**

Woodson skillfully implemented African American historical narratives, which responded to a preponderance of racial theories during this period found in textbooks and academia. For example, rather than present African Americans as victims without achievements, it was common to have entire chapters in these texts dedicated to the achievement of African Americans— with titles such as: “Creating Achievement” (Woodson and Wesley, 1935), “Genius in Spite of Handicap” (Woodson and Wesley, 1928), “Evidence of Progress” (Woodson and Wesley, 1928), and “Achievement in Freedom” (Woodson and Wesley, 1922). These chapters represented the mental capacities of African Americans that were void within mainstream textbooks. In *The Negro and his History* (1922), the student notices the various entrepreneurial and business pursuits made by African Americans. Business organizations such as the National Business League, National Bankers’ Association, the National Association of Funeral Directors, and the National Negro Retail Merchants’ Association were highlighted throughout the pages (p. 459). George Washington Carver was honored for his achievements in science (Woodson and Wesley, 1935 p. 411). Woodson would also laude the accomplishments of Charles Drew (doctor), Dr. Elmer S. Imes (Professor of Physics) and Dr. Percy Julian (Professor of Chemistry) to emphasize the intellectual rigor of African Americans.

**African Americans’ Civic Contributions and the Military**
Another key emphasis of Woodson’s work was to reveal African American civic contributions in U.S. history. The recasting of the story of the African American soldier in U.S. history through the pages of his textbooks served as one example because of the nexus between military service and patriotism. According to Woodson, Black persons, both free and enslaved, were influential in protesting against the taxation policies implored by the King of England (Woodson 1922). In fact, one of the reasons the Boston Massacre occurred, Woodson (1922) wrote, was because a slave, who was present in the crowd, insulted a British officer out of devotion to his country (p. 120). Woodson would emphasize that despite mistreatment by fellow White soldiers and officers, Black soldiers remained loyal. Woodson’s text overall, emphasized that African Americans respected and abided by the democratic virtues the country upheld. These narratives were in direct contrast to the racial construction of the Black citizen as incompetent, unpatriotic, and not contributing to his country.

African American Agency: Slavery and Reconstruction

The happy slave narrative, which Rugg characterized in A History of American Civilization (1930a), was another common portrayal in the mainstream characterization of the enslaved African. In speaking against such characterizations, Woodson (along with Wesley) highlighted several slave uprisings and transgressions. It is important to note that the intent was to show that these acts were not impulsive events by angry enslaved Africans but to underscore that the events were part of an intentional and planned political and social agency. For example, the following from Negro Makers of History (1928) symbolizes these efforts:

In those sections where such efforts of friendly whites were few the Negro fugitives were left to their own initiatives. As they did not know any geography, they usually followed the North Star. They had learned that towards the North they would find friends. With such assistance, sometimes, they had themselves shipped as freight by way of steamers and railroads in boxes and barrels to points in the North where escape was easy. (p. 92)

In addition, Woodson and Wesley’s textbooks explicated major resistance on plantations as well as resistance on slaverships in which many Africans killed and steered vessels away from their destinations to free ports.

The narratives of Reconstruction were told to highlight the willingness for African Americans to better their social, political and economic situations. Woodson’s text highlighted the important Black politicians during that era to contrast and discredit Muzzey’s characterizations of the Black politician as ignorant, superstitious, and gullible (Nash 1995) and Rugg’s notion that Black
politicians were “pawns” for northern carpetbaggers. In *Negro in Our History*, Woodson and Wesley (1922) focused on the economic mobility and strength of Black citizens in the South. As African Americans migrated outside of the South, they had opportunities to use their leverage as the South’s economic backbone. In his texts include the stories of Henry Adams of Louisiana and Benjamin “Pop” Singleton of Tennessee, who attempted to mobilize anywhere from 100,000 to 200,000 African Americans to leave the South as a way to threaten the South’s economic stability and illustrate the importance of Black agricultural labor (p. 429). The text highlighted other strategies by African Americans to leave the South to the North and West for better economic opportunity. Additionally, the desire for education in the Black community resulted in the Freedom Bureau and many religious organizations to establish schools and universities for African Americans. Central to Woodson’s argument throughout each of the texts was to highlight the efforts of African Americans to improve their standard of living after the Civil War.

*African History*

Woodson’s project on Africa was to counter the stereotype that African Americans were a history-less people. He wrote that, “Most Europeans and practically all Americans have regarded the Negro merely as an undesirable—an undeveloped person constituting a problem in not being able to keep pace with others” (Woodson 1936, v). Rugg’s exclusion of countries in Africa in his text and his total disregard to the rich cultural heritage of the content solidified Woodson’s statement. The rationale for reconceptualizing Africa was to explicitly state that people of African descent were a people of profound literary, scientific, and intellectual accomplishment. For example, the supplemental textbook, *African Myths, Together with Proverbs*, told stories originating from the continent that pertained to the philosophical and ethical questions of mankind such as friendship, love, justice, foresight, thrift and knowledge (Woodson 1928). Woodson also correlated Africa’s accomplishment with European history to provide evidence of the advancement of African people (Woodson and Wesley, 1928, pp. 6-7). Woodson and Wesley’s (1922) analysis also provided the students with the contradictions of the Western world in relation to Africa:

The supposedly low depths of the native Africans emphasize the so-called heights attain. As a matter of fact, however, the African civilization does not suffer in comparison with the civilizations of other members of the human family. All have intermingled and borrowed the one from the other. In science, then, there is no such thing as races. Because of lack of opportunity in an unhealthy environment, some may have not accomplished as much as others more favorable
circumstances; but wherever the climate conditions and opportunity for development have been similar, the cultures of various members of the human families have tended to be very alike. (p. 4)

We agree with the assessment of Woodson’s work as stated by Dagbovie (2010) that the purpose for his revisionist ontological work was to focus not only on how African Americans were victimized, but to demonstrate the global influences and contributions of Black persons.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this manuscript was to utilize an analytics of race to examine social studies historiography, particularly as it pertains to African American historical issues. Because social studies historiography has under theorized African American scholars who contributed to the field, further work is needed to highlight the diverse ideas and efforts of African American curriculum revisionists (Woyshner, 2006; Watkins, 2006). The case studies of Rugg and Woodson highlights three ways in which social studies foundation scholars can help in achieving a more holistic historiography. It must be noted that we use African American experiences as an example and these suggestions can be implemented within the various historically underserved communities that contributed to social studies thought and practice.

First, more social studies foundations research should attend to the race question and use race as a tool of analysis. Rugg’s attention to race during his textbooks’ formidable years seemed to ignore the presence of race and racism as an important “American problem.” If social studies/ social education goals were to bring attention to the school children about society issues, then Rugg and other reconstructivist scholars failed to meet the theoretical and practical needs of their ideology. Key to the tenets of CRT is the acknowledgement of the normalcy and permanence of race and racism. Through historically situating race within the confines of social studies thought, gives the field a more holistic understanding of the “American problem.”

Unlike Rugg, Woodson’s purpose was to attend to the racial silences that were apparent within most of the mainstream curricular text of this period. This historical revisionism was explicit because it was clear that much of the historical narratives of African American accomplishments from early American history through the 1930s had not been addressed at all in school text.

Foundation scholarship needs to situate this racial discourse within existing traditional literature already present in foundations research. Social Studies foundations scholars need to explicitly recognize that race and racism existed in thought and practice of early scholars of the field. It is important to note, CRT professes that in order for an authentic research agenda that recognizes the salience of race in social studies ideas, we have to center our literature on the
legacy of racism. We continue to have questions about the ways in which Rugg and other scholars and/or organizations advocated democratic values yet hypocritically ignored it in practice.

Second, we recognize our work on Woodson adds to the growing literature of historically marginalized scholars in social studies foundations. We posit that more revisionist history is needed to expound on marginalized African American scholars and organizations. However, such work needs to move beyond biographical sketches that simply introduce them to the academic world. Although, biographies can be useful in certain settings, the research needs to be theoretically grounded.

While Woodson’s work clearly reflects the most substantive critique and revision of curriculum about African Americans through the social studies and history curriculum, his work is situated within an on-going and enduring curriculum project that traces back to the early nineteenth century. In the U.S., numerous African American scholars critiqued and developed texts for African Americans with an awareness of how the social studies and history curricula of this time helped to circulate and perpetuate the most racist and egregious historical narratives about African Americans (Banks, 1992). From this understanding, there were two central approaches taken to the revision of curriculum about African Americans. These approaches were most evident through the curriculum work of Carter G. Woodson.

Woodson and other African American scholars sought to challenge the racial discourse of the time by tending to the constructions and silences in social studies textbooks. The topics of slavery, reconstruction, and Africa detailed in Rugg’s textbooks were part of a long tradition of curriculum writers that often constructed African Americans as history-less people. The “Black savage” reference in Rugg’s, Changing Civilizations in the Modern World (1930a), is indicative of how mainstream academics characterized African Americans humanity as subpersons (Mills, 1998).

Vital to the philosophical notion of racial ontology is how individuals and groups exist and fit within a constructed racial hierarchy. In the context of a racialized society such as America in the early twentieth century, “whiteness” was constructed as the apex of intelligence, beauty, loyal and morality—while “blackness” was fashioned as antithetical to this rendering of whiteness and White people—often marked as unintelligent, ugly, disloyal, and immoral. Given this racial ontological context, Woodson’s work deliberately challenged and revised the ontological meanings associated with blackness and Black people by highlighting their achievements in all walks of life.

Future work in social studies foundations should attend to the work of other African American scholars with social studies ties such as W.E.B. DuBois, Merl Eppse, Anna Julie Cooper, Alain Locke, Mary McLeod Bethune, Edward Augustus Johnson, Lelia Amos Pendleton, and Laura Eliza Wikes. Research
should be expanded in scholarly and practitioner journals outside the mainstream social studies journals such as the long standing *Journal of Negro Education, Journal of Negro History, Negro Digest, and the Negro History Bulletin*. These respected research journals can provide scholars with alternative perspectives on social education and pedagogical practices. Moreover, foundational scholars can investigate historic national, state and local Black teacher organization’s publications, which can add value in our understanding of how social studies were used in other communities. Extricating knowledge from these resources can help social studies scholars reveal other racial theories that can help the field understand our origins in its complexity.

Last, the work on Rugg and Woodson should provide more research that attends to comparisons between the traditional social studies foundations topics with the curriculum experiences of historically underserved groups. For example, social studies foundation scholars should compare and contrast Black organizations such as the *Association for the Study of Negro Life and History* and the *Association of Social Studies of Negro Teachers* with the organizations such as NEA’s Committee of Social Studies and the National Council of Social Studies. This type of research allows for the field to highlight the similar and divergent ways social studies thought was developed in various communities (Watkins, 2006).

As a whole, Rugg’s textbooks appeared to reify existing historical narratives about African Americans such as “the savage” and the “happy slave.” Even the examples when Rugg tried to give credence to African American culture in *An Introduction to Problems of American Culture* (1932), his focus was too narrow to change attitudes about African Americans. An additive approach highlighting a few African Americans in literature and the arts, did not balance out his approach of mischaracterizing or ignoring African Americans in previous writings.

Conversely, Woodson’s work, deliberately and carefully challenged existing racial theories and ontological beliefs about African Americans. Given the context of race and racism in the 1930s and 1940s it seems almost peculiar as to why Rugg’s project so deliberately missed issues of race and racism, especially since social studies and curriculum studies scholars have heralded his curriculum work as social reconstructionist (Evans, 2007; Mzar, 2003). Nevertheless, both scholars’ works attended to the “American Problem” in vastly different ways and believed that their narratives could elevate instruction in the various communities they served.

**Conclusion**

The field of social studies knows little about how social studies developed in African American communities. Although, our call for more attention to communities of color is not new (Woyshner, 2006, 2009), we propose that
scholars situate these new foundational topics within racial discourse of critical social theory. By situating the knowledge of African American schools and communities, as a field we are giving credence to what Mills (1998) calls *alternative epistemologies*. Since traditional epistemologies are limited because of its racial overtones, *alternative epistemologies* are essential to unpack because traditional paradigms are “inadequate to explain how we know and understand the world” (cited in Dixon & Rousseau p. 217). Simply put, knowledge is not monopolized by traditional social studies foundations topics and we need to understand social studies through *alternative epistemologies* that can aid the field as we mature as a multicultural and multilingual nation.

We conclude by stating that exploring such topics will help to further account for the voluminous and vitally important scholarship African Americans have offered to the fields of social studies and curriculum history. Despite Rugg’s or any other “old master’s” intentions, social studies foundational scholarship is in need of revision of its historiography. Much work is needed in social studies to examine how social studies founders thought about African Americans. In addition, the general field of social studies cannot expand its notions on the continuous issues of race without a cooperative partnership with its foundations counterparts. Foundations scholars should be the example in exposing how the permanence of race has influenced the ideologies that exist within a contemporary context.

**References**


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**Notes**

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