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**TÍTULO:** La enseñanza de la Historia de los Estados Unidos en el Estado de la Florida: Una interpretación de la teoría fundamentada.

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**RESUMEN:** El presente estudio explora algunos de los estándares centrales de Historia de los Estados Unidos en el programa de estudios sociales de secundaria de la Florida. Los estándares se interpretan a través de un enfoque de Teoría Fundamentada para identificar los principales temas, conceptos y categorías incluidos en el programa de estudios de secundaria de Historia de los Estados Unidos. El estudio encuentra una considerable ambigüedad en cuanto a la redacción de los estándares que tratan temas posiblemente divisivos. Además, se espera que los profesores ejerzan un amplio grado de discreción en cuanto al desarrollo de planes de lecciones y la identificación de ejemplos específicos para enseñar determinados períodos históricos.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Historia de los Estados Unidos, estándares, diseño curricular, teoría fundamentada

**TITLE:** Teaching United States History in the State of Florida: A Grounded Theory Interpretation.

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**ABSTRACT:** The present study explores some of the core United States History standards in Florida's secondary social studies program. Standards are interpreted through a Grounded Theory approach to identify the main themes, concepts, and categories included in the United States history high school curriculum. The study finds considerable ambiguity in terms of the wording of standards dealing with possibly divisive topics. Moreover, teachers are expected to exercise a large degree of discretion in terms of the development of lessons plans and the identification of specific examples to teach particular historical periods.

**KEY WORDS:** United States History, Standards, Curriculum Design, Grounded Theory

## **INTRODUCTION.**

One of the most controversial topics in the field of education is the teaching of history and of civics on (Bronstein, 2020); (von Feigenblatt & Acuña, 2021); (von Feigenblatt et al, 2022); (von Feigenblatt et al, 2021); (von Feigenblatt et al, 2021a); (Zhao et al, 2007).

The polarized nature of the public sphere and the centrality that issues of identity have gained in the United States makes the teaching of history at the secondary school level fraught with challenges. Radical programs such as the controversial 1619 Project which attempts to reinterpret the entire span of United States history through the lens of slavery, and the rise of Critical Race Theory as an overarching framework to develop lesson plans fostering an emphasis on structural violence, have caused serious rifts in the education epistemic community as well as in the population at large (von Feigenblatt, 2015); (Hilburn et al, 2016).

The United States' decentralized system and its unique historical development have resulted in an education system which is centered on the individual States rather than on the Federal government (Byrd & Varga, 2018); (von Feigenblatt & Acuña, 2021). Thus, States have control over education and each State has the power to define its own curriculum. At the same time, local school boards

have power over public schools and thus are expected to implement State mandates. Due to the locally elected nature of school boards, there is a wide range of backgrounds, ideas, and ideologies represented. Therefore, there can be considerable differences from one school district to another in the same state. Standards are meant to provide legal guidelines about the content that should be included in the curriculum for a particular state regardless of school district. Moreover, standards also provide guidelines regarding learning objectives and in some cases, skills that students are expected to acquire (Kimball, 2013); (Peñafiel et al, 2021).

Standards enjoy the force of law and thus are passed by the legislature with the approval of the governor. Nevertheless, the nature of the legislative process requires considerable negotiation in order to reach consensus or at least a majority and thus results in watering down certain standards so as to find the lowest common denominator. Even though this approach eases the process of negotiation, it results in very ambiguous and incompletely explained standards. Teachers are expected to interpret the standards and to decide how those standards will be taught with the aid of district leadership (Stern & Johnston, 2013); (Álvarez et al, 2020).

Recent controversies over the teaching of certain parts of United States history, such as the very establishment of the country, has caused parental backlash at the perceived bias of some educators in presenting standards. The backlash over the implementation of certain standards added to the concurrent debate over the choice of texts by school libraries and teachers has resulted in an unprecedented challenge to the traditional concept of academic freedom. Historically, teachers in the United States have enjoyed considerable discretion as to how standards are taught in their classrooms (von Feigenblatt & Acuña, 2021). Teachers are expected to separate their personal opinions and feelings from the subjects that they teach and to present a balanced view to the students with the ultimate goal of helping students achieve the standard. Nevertheless, the radical behavior

of a few teachers such as vandalism of public property and leading students to protest has eroded the image of the unbiased educator (von Feigenblatt, 2020a); (von Feigenblatt, 2020b).

In particular, social studies teachers are perceived to be radical and highly politicized. One example of one such teacher who made news headlines is Derrick Garforth, a teacher at Pawtucket Public Schools who in 2020 vandalized a Christopher Columbus statue (Baffoni, 2020). Another example is Tomaris Hill, a World History and African American Studies teacher at Kathleen High School in Lakeland who organized two hundred students to protest a new dress code. Fifteen students were arrested during the protest and the teacher was charged with a misdemeanor. Another example is the case of Amy Donofrio, who prominently displayed a “Black Lives Matter” flag in her classroom door, bringing controversial political discourse to the fore at Riverside High School. Her 2021 case made national headlines and was settled with the Duval School Board for \$300,000. Part of the settlement required Donofrio to abstain from ever teaching again in the district. The previously mentioned examples are just a few of many divisive and highly politicized cases involving teachers and social issues. It should be noted that many teachers are not local and therefore many teach in districts where the parents and school board members may be more conservative than the localities where they came from (Manchester, 2022).

As a result of the political backlash over the perceived radicalism of teachers in Florida, the Florida legislature has passed the Parental Rights in Education Bill which becomes effect on the 1st of July 2022. This Bill “prohibits classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in certain grade levels” and also requires school boards to keep parents informed about decisions concerning the mental and social development of their children. A second bill dealing with education is known as the Individual Freedom Bill which deals with the prevention of the integration of Critical Race Theory in Florida classrooms. The Bill will become effective on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2022 and it constraints the discretion of teachers and districts in terms of teaching issues of race. A third Bill

dealing with issues of history education in Florida is known as the Civic Education Curriculum Bill and it became effective on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2021. This particular law requires schools and districts to get approval from the Florida Department of Education for civic education resources.

Standards play a central role in the debate over civics and history education in the United States and in particular in the State of Florida. The present study deals with the challenges in terms of interpreting the standards for United States History at the high school level based on the coding of the standards themselves. A constructivist theoretical framework sets the stage for a Grounded Theory approach. (von Feigenblatt & Acuña, 2021)

## **DEVELOPMENT.**

### **Theoretical framework and methodology.**

The present study follows a constructivist approach which borrows certain elements from the thick description of applied anthropology (Gillion, 2020); (Jackson & Nexon, 2009). Grounded Theory was chosen as the methodology for the study. Glaser and Strauss developed Grounded Theory as an alternative to the hypothetico-deductive approach to research (von Feigenblatt, 2013); (Glaser & Strauss, 2009b). Their goal was to empower scholars to “discover” models and theories based on the data itself rather than superimpose theories on a particular phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 2009a). Thus, Grounded Theory is an inductive qualitative approach which combines the data gathering stage with data analysis. Themes, categories, and properties are coded from the data until they are saturated (Quilaqueo & San Martin, 2008).

Rather than follow the traditional linear research process, Grounded Theory favors an iterative approach in which the researcher transitions back and forth between data gathering and interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016); (Willis et al, 2007). The main goal of Grounded Theory is interpretation and thus fits into a constructivist theoretical framework which posits that we share and built an intersubjective reality with our subject of study (von Feigenblatt, 2010a).

The present study involved the coding and interpretation of thirteen United States History standards of the State of Florida. A detailed coding process was followed, and it was aided by the ancillary and non-statutory, guidance provided for certain standards by the State of Florida. The coding and interpretation of the standards and ancillary guidance comments resulted in the discovery of several central categories, properties, and themes. The following section presents the coding and interpretation of the standards.

### **Themes, Categories, and Properties: United States History Standards of the State of Florida.**

The initial batch of coding resulted in the identification of several core categories, representing central themes in the emic understanding of the World History and US History curriculum in Palm Beach county. State standards served as the central initial primary texts (State of Florida, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e, 2022f, 2022g, 2022i, 2022k, 2022l, 2022m).

As discussed in previous sections of this study, standards serve as the official learning goals for both students and teachers in the State of Florida. The standards represent the consensus reached by a vast array of stakeholders, including local governments, the state legislature, teachers' associations, and parental associations, regarding the topics that students should learn from their teachers for each subject. All instruction and evaluation have to be based on the standards. Moreover, standards remain relatively stable for many years, on average a decade, due to the long and complex process required to modify them.

The present section provides an example of how the text of one of the standards was coded in order to derive concepts and categories. This example focuses on one of the most important standards for the United States History curriculum. "SS.912.A.3.7 Compare the experience of European immigrants in the east to that of Asian immigrants in the west (the Chinese Exclusion Act, Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan)"; initial coding points to the repetition of the term "immigrants". The action word in the statement is "compare" (State of Florida, 2022d). Further

coding of other standards also shows a high incidence of the word “compare” as a central action word. “Experience” is the subject of the standard. “Comparing” implies differences which combined with “experience” and “immigrants” can be condensed into the category “diversity”. West and East can be merged into the property of “regional”, which in turn is a property of “diversity”. Thus, the core category for this standard is clearly “diversity with several properties which connect it to other standards.

A second example shows the coding process for standard number SS.912.A.2.7 “Review the Native American experience” (State of Florida, 2022b). The term “native America” implies ethnicity and the nexus between native and American implies “diversity”. “Experience” is used again in this standard further implying a certain degree of difference in terms of events and shared culture. Thus the concepts, categories, and properties identified in the previous standard reappear in the coding for SS.912.A.2.7. The category of “diversity” is further expanded through the identification of the property “ethnicity” complementing “regional” in the previous standard.

To further elucidate the reader regarding the nature of the coding process, the coding process for a third standard will also be described in detail. Standard SS.912.A.2.5. “assess how Jim Crow Laws influenced life for African Americans and other racial/ethnic minority groups” (State of Florida, 2022a). This standard explicitly mentions “racial/ethnic minority groups” which echoes “diversity”. Moreover, the word “influence life” can be condensed into the concept of “experience”, seen in previous standards. Jim Crow Laws are an example of the American legal system and due to the negative connotation of these laws; they can be grouped into a category labeled “structural violence”. Even though the exact words “structural violence” do not appear in the text, the sociological term encompasses political and legal structures that negatively target the socio-economic development of certain identifiable groups. In this standard, the direct mention of

“African American” together with “racial/ethnic minority groups” clearly alludes to the category of “structural violence”. Properties of “diversity” include “ethnicity” and “race”.

SS.912.A.2.6 states that “Compare the effects of the Black Codes and the Nadir on freed people, and analyze the sharecropping system and debt peonage as practiced in the United States” (State of Florida, 2022a). This standard deals with some of the same issues as the previous one. The word “compare” implies difference. “Black” is related to “race” and “black codes” and “debt peonage” are part of the “experience” of this particular group. “Black codes” and “peonage” are legal and economic structures which resulted in the “nadir” of “freed people”. “Nadir” means “lowest point” implying a negative experience. The overarching category of “structural violence” encompasses the terms “black codes”, “peonage”, and the property labeled “perspective/experience”. Moreover, the category labeled “diversity” can also be identified in this standard.

SS.912.A.3.7. “Compare the experience of European immigrants in the east to that of Asian immigrants in the west (the Chinese Exclusion Act, Gentlemen’s Agreement with Japan)” (State of Florida, 2022d). The parallelism in terms of structure between this standard and several of the ones previously coded is not a coincidence. “Compare”, “experience”, and terms such as “European”, “Asian” and “immigrant” dealing with “ethnicity” and “origin” appear in this standard. “Diversity” as a category is clearly present in this standard. The concern for “difference” is also evident from the standards previously coded as well as the present one. It is also interesting the “immigration” focuses on place of origin rather than “race”. The part of the standard included in parenthesis requires specialized content knowledge in history in order to code.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was a law passed in the United States, at the Federal Level, to prevent virtually all immigration from China to the United States. Japan agreed to limit its own emigration to the United States in what came to be known as the “Gentlemen’s Agreement” (von Feigenblatt, 2009a); (von Feigenblatt 2010d); (von Feigenblatt, 2012); (von Feigenblatt, 2016). One of the



challenges in terms of coding and interpreting this particular standard is that each historical event mentioned in parenthesis encompasses a very complex socio-historical phenomenon. Moreover, specialized knowledge regarding the historical context of the events is necessary in order to identify concepts, properties, and categories.

Both the Chinese Exclusion Act and “Japan’s Gentlemen’s Agreement” are related to immigration and historians identify them as examples of nativism and racism in terms of policy. The specific examples included in the standard in parenthesis provide support for the emphasis of the standard on the issue of “diversity” and the central category of “structural violence”.

SS.912.A.3.5. “identify significant inventors of the Industrial Revolution including African Americans and women” (State of Florida, 2022c). A very concise standard focusing on a period of rapid socio-economic and political change focuses on two particular groups, namely, “African Americans” and “Women”. Grounded theory and discursive analysis more broadly, focuses on semantics as a way to elucidate intent, in terms of policymaking (Charmaz, 2014); (Glaser & Strauss, 2009b). One of the concepts that stand out in this particular standard is “African Americans”. This particular concept is fraught with challenges in terms of coding because of the use of the term “Black” as part of other standards such as SS.912.A.2.6. Nevertheless it should be noted that in that case, “Black” is used as an attribute of “Codes” and reflects the preferred term used by historian and contemporaries to label the set of laws passed in the American South in order to restrict the freedoms and rights of African Americans (Abramowitz, 2018); (von Feigenblatt, 2015); (von Feigenblatt, 2020b). At the same time the term “African American” is more restrictive than “Black”. Thus, a person may be of Indian or Pakistani descent and historically fit into the broad category of “Black” but not into the category of “African American”. Thus, the two terms have complicated and contested histories.

The explicit mention of the term in the standard implies a particular emphasis on the experiences of this particular group, an ethnic group based on descent. A further clarification is that the term African American as understood in the American context, refers to descendants of formerly enslaved people brought from Sub-Saharan Africa (Chetty et al, 2018). This is an important clarification because the term comes with a complex ideological baggage such as the legacy of slavery. Thus, a White Namibian who migrated to the United States and became a naturalized citizen would not usually be considered African American.

SS.912.A.3.8. “Examine the importance of social change and reform in the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (class system, migration from farms to cities, Social Gospel movement, role of settlement houses and churches in providing services to the poor)” (State of Florida, 2022e). This standard tackles several important themes in social studies such as the idea of “social change” and “reform”. The information provided in parenthesis is of particular importance because it provides a glimpse at the type of “social change”, the policy makers who framed the standards want to emphasize. Reform implies gradual change and the examples provided in parenthesis further support the “gradual” nature of social change. The Social Gospel movement was inherently conservative in terms of promoting the idea that good works and religious salvation happen together (Fieno, 2002). This Christian movement favored private initiatives rather than public intervention and favored protestant Christian ethics to deal with issues such as poverty, inequality, and alcoholism. Settlement houses were also private endeavors dealing with social ills and the role of churches is a prime example of private action to deal with public issues (Thelin, 2011).

The centrality of the examples in parenthesis is evidenced by the rhetoric coming from Tallahassee, in particular the Governor and the Secretary of Education of Florida, who clearly favor personal liberty and individual choice (Manchester, 2022). Nevertheless, standards are a product of a complex struggle between different interest groups. The inclusion of “class system” among the

specific examples indirectly reflects that balance. To provide more context, issues of class and economic distribution, were central in political discourse during 1970s and continue to be a concern for many working class Floridians (Sabogal, 2012). Even though “class” as a concept is considered taboo in American political discourse, its inclusion in this standard reflects the condensation of a vast array of issues dealing with poverty and inequality. “Class” is a more academic and neutral concept compared to “inequality” and “poverty” (von Feigenblatt, 2009a). Thus, even though issues dealing with economic distribution are included, there is an obvious attempt at presenting them in neutral language and depriving them of intentionality. This particular example contradicts the category of “structural violence” and reflects the tensions inherent with reaching a consensus on standards. It is necessary to code and interpret the standards with knowledge about the historical context as well as with content knowledge about the historical events.

SS.912.A.3.10 “review different economic and philosophic ideologies” is a very broad standard and deals with a wide range of issues and theories (State of Florida, 2022f). The ambiguity of the wording of this standard reflects the lack of consensus on the content that should be taught in this section of the World History curriculum. Compared to the previously coded standards, the degree of conciseness and lack of examples is evident.

Traditionally, United States History textbooks include an overview of socialism, communism, utilitarianism, and capitalism. Nevertheless, the standard does not enumerate the philosophies or provide guidance regarding how they should be taught. This particular standard has become a point of contention in the State of Florida due to the demographic makeup of the State and the polarized nature of the public sphere in the United States (Geertz, 2010).

Florida is home to a large and influential Cuban-American community with a hardened stance towards communism and socialism based on decades of struggle with the Cuban communist regime (Balderrama & Martínez, 2010); (Schiller & Liefner, 2007). More recent arrivals, such as the

Venezuelan and Colombian communities, are also very sensitive regarding issue of political ideology (Shumow & Pinto, 2014). Many immigrants from Venezuela and Colombia have fled their countries due to insecurity and socialist regimes. The concentration of those ethnic groups in South Florida has resulted in a highly motivated web of interest groups and politicians holding a staunchly anti-socialist stance. Some guidance is provided by the individual districts but this guidance varies from district to district and is considered to be advisory in nature rather than statutory (Zhao et al, 2007).

The guidance provided by the Palm Beach School District recommends covering the following topics “market economy, mixed economy, planned economy and philosophic examples are capitalism, socialism, communism, anarchy” (State of Florida, 2022f). The coding of this particular standard shows the concurrent nature of coding, sampling, and interpretation in the Grounded Theory approach. In order to develop the category of “ideology”, it was necessary to expand the sample of texts to include guidance documents developed by the Palm Beach County School District; moreover, secondary sources providing context regarding the socio political demographic makeup of Florida were also necessary in order to understand the centrality of this particular standard in terms of the political polarization of the United States.

SS.912.A.3.11 “Analyze the impact of political machines in United States cities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries” (State of Florida, 2022g). This standard also requires considerable content and context knowledge in order to interpret. The standard itself is very concise. No examples are explicitly and the standard does not even provide a clue as to the emphasis in terms of effects. Moreover, it is also important to note that political machines in cities were controlled by the Democrat Party and thus there is a partisan bias to this particular standard. Political machines refer to politicians who controlled the bureaucracy and local government of a city through the control over city jobs and government contracts.

The Democratic Party has controlled most major city governments since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and historically, it used political machines to incorporate newcomers, immigrants, into the political and economic systems. The term “political machine” has a negative connotation and implies a certain degree of “corruption” and manipulation of the electoral process. Including this particular phenomenon as a standalone standard is not a coincidence.

The Florida legislature is firmly controlled by the Republican Party, a party favoring small government and limited immigration. Therefore, the standard reflects the emphasis placed by policy makers, in this case Florida legislators, in terms of raising awareness about this particular historical period. The urban/rural political divide in Florida is an issue of central importance due to the overwhelming control exerted by rural areas over the legislature (Gillion, 2020). Thus, the significance of this standard can only be understood based on the contemporary battles over control of state and local governments in Florida. In a way, it is an attempt by the State government to explain the balance between rural and urban voters. There is also an allusion to the problems of class-based politics. Political Machines focused on the mobilization of organized labor and syndicates. Florida is a one of the most restrictive states in terms of labor rights and it is considered to be a “right to work” State, meaning that other than in a few fields such as education and government employees, all contracts for employment are “at will” and no reason needs to be given to terminate employment (Sabogal, 2012).

SS..912.A.3.12 “Compare how different nongovernmental organizations and progressives worked to shape public policy, restore economic opportunities, and correct injustices in American life” (State of Florida, 2022h). This particular standard focuses on the role of civil society in terms of its role in leading the charge for changes in American society, in particular during the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Several terms in this standard stand out. The inclusion of both “nongovernmental organizations” and “progressives” in the same sentence is of particular interest and will be explained

in detail. Once again, content knowledge is required in order to interpret this very broad standard. It should be noted that contrary to the contemporary situation with non-governmental organizations, early NGOs in the United States focused on conservative causes such as temperance, family values, and philanthropy to help the poor (Thelin, 2011). Thus, the inclusion of “progressives” in the same standard clearly points to a compromise solution to include two ideological currents as part of the United States History curriculum.

The term “progressive” at the time was usually linked to the fight for civil rights (mostly dealing with issues of race) and issues of labor rights. Moreover, the wording of the rest of the standard supports the interpretation of including two very different strains of civil society activism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The temperance movement, one of the most prominent examples of a cause favored by nongovernmental organizations, reflected concerns based on conservative values focused on personal behavior and its impact on perceived social ills. “Restore economic opportunities” is emblematic of a traditional conservative goal. The wording is important because “opportunities” are not the same as “entitlements” and the choice of verb “restore” implies that opportunities already existed in America. On the other hand, the inclusion of “correct injustice in American life” represents the goals of progressives. The wording is also revealing in terms of how ambiguous it is. “Correct injustice in American life” clearly fits with the previously identified category of “structural violence”. Nevertheless, this standard requires further clarification in order to fully interpret its meaning. The State provides “further guidance” for this particular standard.

The guidance section has no legal force but aims to clarify the aims of the standard. A vast array of examples are provided, such as NAACP, YMCA, Women’s Temperance Union, Theodore Roosevelt, William Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, and William Jennings Bryan, inter alia (State of Florida, 2022h). The range of examples and the causes they represent is striking. The NAACP is one of the core organizations leading the civil rights movement

for racial equality. Family values and in particular the role of alcohol as the source of many social ills was the focus of the Women's Temperance Union.

Theodore Roosevelt was one of the most prominent American conservatives who focused on reforming the military and in particular in expanding the Navy. Roosevelt eventually became Secretary of the Navy and President of the United States. He presided over one of the most radical expansions of American power and territory in the history of the country. Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois are known as early leaders of the civil rights movement (Fieno, 2002). With very different approaches as to the path towards civil rights, one of them favored the struggle for immediate rights while the other one favored a more gradual approach through economic improvement. Woodrow Wilson, the bookish president of the United States during World War I, is considered to be an early example of American idealism in terms of foreign policy. Finally, William Jennings Bryan, was a defender of the working class and favored the transition to silver from gold so as to expand the supply of money and help the poor.

Jennings Bryan ran for the presidency with the backing of organized labor and his candidacy is considered to be the highest point in terms of labor organization in American history. The range of examples provided is a clear compromise between different political forces and interest groups. A single standard encompasses central issues in American history such as "economic opportunities", "public policy", the role of individual initiative in dealing with social ills, and "structural violence". SS.912.A.6.15 "examine key events and peoples in Florida history as they relate to United States history" is one of the most ambiguous and broad standards in the United States History curriculum (State of Florida, 2022i). This is one of the few state specific standards in the entire curriculum but it is a clear reminder of the role of the state government in terms of controlling education. It should be noted that the United States Constitution does not grant power over education to the Federal government and thus state governments have control over education.

There is a wide continuum in terms of State specific history content in the United States. Some states like Texas include large portions of the history curriculum focused on state specific events while others like New York favor a national level curriculum. In the case of Florida, the standard dealing with Florida history is very broad and provides very little in terms of specific guidance. Nevertheless, the wording used provides a few clues as to the topics that were intended to be covered in the US History curriculum. The choice of using “peoples” implies “diversity” and strengthens the idea of a multicultural society with different ideas and experiences. Thus, the open nature of the standard lends itself to the inclusion of a vast array of events and “peoples” involved in the historical development of Florida. For this particular standard, it is helpful to look at the guidance provided by the State, even if the guidance section does not have statutory weight. The guidance section includes recommended examples such as “the influence of Cuban, Greek and Italian immigrants”. Demographic context is important in terms of understanding the significance of the specific groups mentioned in the guidance section. The Cuban community has played a pivotal role in the development of the State of Florida. Its disproportionate influence can be ascertained by a brief look at the last names of some prominent politicians. Senator Marco Rubio is of Cuban ancestry, Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Núñez is Cuban, the Mayor of the City of Miami, Francisco Suarez is Cuban, and the list continues. From an economic perspective Tampa and Miami have served as center of economic activities for the Cuban community in Florida (Shumow & Pinto, 2014).

Tobacco in Tampa and a vast array of other activities in South Florida are just some of the many examples available of Cuban economic dynamism. The Greek community, while relatively small, has considerable influence in the Tampa Bay area. Italians are spread throughout the state, but many have achieved important positions of power such as the current governor, Ron DeSantis.

The Italian community has played a disproportionately important political role in the State due to the conservative nature of the community and its predominantly Roman Catholic faith. A triple



alliance between conservative Cubans, Italians, and rural Florida basically controls both the legislature as well as the Governor's mansion. It is also important to identify a few notable communities that were not mentioned in the guidance such as the large Haitian community and the Honduran one. The Haitian community is important in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and Palm Beach, and therefore, its absence from the list is surprising. Hondurans and other Central Americans were also excluded. Understanding the exclusion of those groups requires considerable context knowledge. Those groups tend to be focused in urban areas and tend to be linked to the Democratic Party. Moreover, many of them are undocumented or hold refugee status (Sabogal, 2012).

SS.912.A.7.1 "identify causes for Post-World War II prosperity and its effects on American society" deals with a pivotal formative moment in American history (State of Florida, 2022a). This particular standard deals with a particularly significant moment in American history due to its perceived role in leading the United States into great power status. Moreover, it is a core moment in the traditional narrative of American exceptionalism. One of the challenges in terms of coding and interpreting this particular standard is that once again, it requires content knowledge, and it is very concise with the expectation that the teacher is well versed in the subject and that certain assumptions are shared by both teachers and policymakers. Thus, a shared intersubjective reality is implied. Nevertheless, the wording of the standard itself is interesting. "Causes" implies a high degree of certainty in terms of the relationship between post World War II prosperity and certain historical events. The causes are not explicitly identified.

The ambiguity in the standard can lead to a range of interpretations and examples. In particular, justifying the relationship between World War II prosperity and unspecified historical events is fraught with challenges for teachers and education leaders. Moreover, the selection of examples can be biased in favor of a certain type of effect. Thus, there is the danger of ideological bias in the teaching of this particular standard. The lack of focus is evidence of lack of consensus.

SS.912.A.7.2 states that students should be able to “compare the relative prosperity between different ethnic groups and social classes in the post-World War II period” (State of Florida, 2022j). This standard deals with two important categories that were previously identified, namely, diversity. The standard assumes that the differences in prosperity existed and that those were mostly distributed based on ethnicity and social class. This reminds us of the category of “structural violence” that was identified in previous sections of the chapter. Moreover, the standard also reminds us of the category labeled “diversity”. This standard emphasizes divisions in American society and reflects a particular interpretation of history which focuses on social stratification and implies other related concepts such as racism. The ambiguous wording of the standard provides a glimpse at the lack of consensus over certain terms. At the same time the inclusion of this term provides clear evidence that certain issues were discussed by the legislature.

As previously mentioned, Florida is highly polarized politically and one of the central controversies is the teaching of critical race theory (Sabogal, 2012); (Shumow & Pinto, 2014). At the core of the debate over the inclusion of issues related to “structural violence” is not the fact that there were differences between the different ethnic groups and social classes but rather the cause of the inequality. Thus, the two sides of the debate provide alternative interpretations on the root causes of inequality. One school of thought focuses on “structural inequality”, the inherent injustice built into the legal and political system itself while the other one focuses on individual responsibility.

## **CONCLUSIONS.**

The present study has identified several core categories in Florida’s United States History standards. Structural inequality is a recurrent category, and it is linked to properties such as “economic opportunities”, “racial discrimination”, and “diversity”.

“Diversity” is a complex category because it is linked to “structural violence”, but at the same time it is also inextricably linked to “economic opportunity” and “American exceptionalism”. Thus, the standards display the divergent interpretations of the American development experience. Moreover, the discussion of race is ambiguous and alternates from an emphasis on “ethnicity” to an emphasis on “origin”. Thus, the main finding of this study is that the standards are ambiguous partly due to the decentralized nature of the American education system and as a reflection to parallel debates in the public sphere over the significance and interpretation of pivotal historical events.

The very broad and ambiguous nature of the standards requires considerable content knowledge from teachers in order to interpret them and to prepare lesson plans. At the same time, their broad and ambiguous nature means that teachers have considerable discretion as to how those standards are taught and even in terms of the choice of examples. One of the challenges is that historical events can only be understood in context, and as explained in the section about the theoretical framework, a teacher’s background and theoretical preferences shape those interpretations.

The choice of examples chosen to illustrate certain standards may favor one or another interpretation of a historical event or phenomenon. Therefore, the ambiguity of the standards places a large burden of responsibility on teachers and assumes that teachers have the required training and professionalism to focus on the balance presentation of the content. Examples included in the introduction to this study show that the required training and professionalism is not always present and that abuses do take place in the classroom.

### **Recommendations.**

The findings of the present study support the assertion that either teachers need more training, or the standards need clarification so as to prevent their misuse as tools to promote the ideological preferences of the instructor. Even though the optimal solution would be to provide greater training to teachers or to raise the requirements for teachers of such central subjects such as United States

History, the current teacher shortage and the lack of funding to recruit more qualified candidates makes this option highly unlikely. On the other hand, recent legislative action shows that parents and policy makers have decided to take action to constraint academic freedom so as to protect the integrity of the curriculum as well as to enshrine the once very obvious purpose, of socializing the next generation of Americans and transforming them into productive and patriotic members of the nation.

A possible concurrent effort to protect the integrity of the teaching of the social sciences in general but of United States History specifically, would involve professional associations of educators providing guidance and greater training to their members so as to pre-empt the need for the further erosion of academic freedom. Rather than professional associations simply functioning as interest groups and ideological advocacy networks, their political neutrality should be strengthened.

The political polarization of the teaching profession and its identification with a specific political tendency will further exacerbate the educator shortage. As the “Teach for America” program shows, many bright young Americans enjoy teaching but have very negative perceptions about the teaching profession (Stern & Johnston, 2013). Many bright young American college graduates choose to enter the private sector because of higher pay but there is also the possibility that many of them also prefer the perceived meritocratic culture of this sector over the perceived bureaucratic nature of the public sector.

**For further research.**

The current educator shortage as well as the deep polarization of the American public regarding education requires further research so as to promote an informed dialogue by all stakeholders. Understanding the challenges faced by educators in the development of lesson plans is a good starting point.

A worthy study similar to the one presented in this paper would deal with the Florida Standards for World History. This important subject exposes high school students to the world and shapes their identities as global citizens and as productive members of the American society. Further study is also needed in terms of the possible impacts of recent legislative actions taken so as to constraint abuses in the teaching of gender, political philosophy, and diversity.

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