

Teaching the 2008 Presidential Election at Three Demographically Diverse Schools: An Exercise in Neoliberal Governmentality

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Abstract:

This article describes the disparity in political instruction found in six government classes from three demographically diverse high schools during the 2008 Presidential Election. In general, students from working-class households or those in lower-level classes were rarely given opportunities to discuss politics at a national level or engage in analytical discussions of the election; students in middle-to-upper-class schools and those in advanced-level classes were privy to rich discussions of politics on a regular basis. Using Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality as a guide, these findings are then discussed as symptomatic of a neoliberal approach to education in which students are trained for the presumed roles they will play in the nation's political economy as adults.

Article:

"I was watching last night and was starting to get worried that it was going to get close because Obama was at 206 [electoral votes] and McCain was gaining [in the Midwest]"—Emilio, student at Roosevelt¹

"Once McCain lost Pennsylvania and Virginia, I knew it was over. At that point I was just hoping the Democrats didn't get to 60 [Senate seats]"—Tommy, student at St. Thomas

Both of these comments, the first from a student in a general-level class at an urban high school and the other from an advanced placement student at an exclusive private school, were made the day after President Obama had won the 2008 Presidential Election and are representative of the political instruction each received in their social studies classes in the months leading up to the election. Emilio's comment suggests sincere enthusiasm in the outcome of the election, but a general unawareness of polling data and electoral math, whereas Tommy's thought process mirrored that of most political pundits who had predicted that McCain needed to win almost all of the swing states to combat Obama's substantial leads in electoral-heavy states, such as California and New York. Given that these two students attended high schools that are located only five miles apart, one must begin to inquire, then, into the factors that allow certain groups of students to gain a fairly sophisticated understanding of politics while others, as research has shown, fail to develop even basic political understanding (Niemi and Junn 1998).

Using data from a study of six government and civics classes² in three demographically diverse high schools during coverage of the 2008 Presidential Election, I analyze the governmentality (Foucault 1991) of teaching politics in secondary education. Within this framework, schools play an integral role in society by preparing students for their future roles as contributors to the political economy of the state, and, as such, curricular decisions are often made with this goal in mind. In this article, I argue that the political education that the students in these six classes received tended to correlate with their perceived academic ability and future sociopolitical status, an instructional philosophy that furthers what Hess (2008) terms the "democracy divide" in the United States.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nearly half a century ago, Litt (1963) conducted a study of civics textbooks used in schools from working-, middle-, and upper-class communities and found that although few differences existed in the descriptions of American political institutions and procedures, the textbooks appeared to discuss notions of political participation in ways that correlated with the socioeconomic statuses of their respective communities. The textbooks used by the working-class school contained few references to participatory forms of citizenship, such as voting or feelings of political efficacy, compared to the textbooks used by the middle- and upper-class schools, and only the upper-class schools used textbooks that raised awareness of political processes and the ramifications of political decision-making. Litt concluded that the textbooks served to aid in the various social training that was occurring at each school: The working-class students were learning that politics is conducted by governmental institutions on behalf of its citizens; the middle-class students were being told that they had certain civic responsibilities, such as voting, but that decision-making was left to government officials; and the upper-class students were being groomed into policymakers.

Although he did not use the terminology, Litt (1963) was effectively describing a neoliberal approach to education. In an attempt at a broad definition, Harvey (2005) describes neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade." He continues by stating, "The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices" (2). In the United States, neoliberalism can be traced to the early 1980s and the election of Ronald Reagan when a conservative movement toward free market ideals replaced the social democratic liberalism that had been in existence since the Great Depression (Hursh 2007).

In the years preceding his death, Michel Foucault (1991) gave a series of lectures at the College de France on topics pertaining to political rationality and powers of the state, which he termed *governmentality*. He uses the term as a play on words to describe what he calls "the art of government" (87), or the evolution of government from the sovereign powers of 16th century Europe to the decentralized system of government that defines contemporary neoliberal society (Fimyar 2008; Gordon 1991; Lemke 2001). Foucault's definition of government, however, harkens to an archaic use of the term that describes the conduct of individuals, such as the governing of families or communities, rather than public policy developed and enforced by the state (Foucault 1982). As he notes, "The practices of government are, on the one hand, multifarious and concern many kinds of people; the head of a family, the superior of a convent, the teacher or tutor of a pupil; so that there are several forms of government among which the prince's relation to his state is only one particular mode; while, on the other hand, all these other kinds of government are internal to the state or society" (Foucault 1991, 91). In other words, Foucault views government as a conduct that ranges from governing oneself to governing others through various social institutions, rather than being subjugated by direct authority from a centralized power (Lemke 2001; Simons and Masschelein 2006). Instead, power emanates naturally throughout society and is fueled by population, resulting in what Foucault terms *biopower* (Foucault 1980b). In this sense, power becomes a productive entity rather than a form of domination that serves to subordinate unwilling participants (Lemke 2002). According to Foucault (1980b), power "produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (119). Governmentality, then, may be described as "the effort to create governable subjects through various techniques developed to control, normalize and shape people's conduct" (Fimyar 2008, 5).

In other words, society, or population, determines the range and scope of government and, thus, is responsible for the success or failure of the political economy (Dean 2002). As Foucault (1991) states,

Population comes to appear above all else as the ultimate end of government. In contrast to sovereignty, government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc.; and the means that the government uses to attain these ends are themselves all in some sense immanent to the population. It is the population itself on which government will act either directly through large-scale

campaigns, or indirectly through techniques that will make possible, without the full awareness of the people, the stimulation of birth rates, the directing of the flow of population into certain regions or activities, etc. (100)

At the center of this governmental framework is what Foucault (1991) calls "apparatuses of security" (102) for the state, or the agencies and institutions designated to instill societal norms within the population. He describes this element of government as

The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has at its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security (102).

Within this context, education acts as one such institution based on its responsibility to train students to become productive members of society (Peters 2001; Popkewitz 1998; Simons and Masschelein 2006).

Given its role as an apparatus of security, it is not surprising, then, that schooling has become increasingly politicized in recent years as various groups vie for power over the social norms being transmitted in classrooms. Formation of curriculum standards, implementation of state testing, and other accountability reforms are but a few of the ways in which policymakers have attempted to ensure that all students obtain enough basic knowledge in primary and secondary education to become socially and economically productive adults (Hursh 2007). A debate over the effectiveness of such programs is beyond the scope of this article, but they serve as excellent examples of schools performing their roles within a neoliberal governmentality system.

As the study by Litt (1963) at the beginning of this section demonstrated, a consequence of this neoliberal approach to education is that students are often educated based on their political and economic likelihood, rather than their potential. As Popkewitz and Brennan (1998) note, "Different students in schools are ... differentiated according to different scales and categories, often through the medium of assessment, but also through the privileging of certain kinds of content and approaches to teaching and learning. Students will be cared for in a range of ways, and different kinds of statistics will be collected and collated in relation to their positioning and achievements" (23). Harvey (2005) would argue that this type of stratification is characteristic of neoliberalism in that markets must be created even in areas of society where they do not naturally exist. The fact that the government allows elite private schools to exist in competition with public school systems is an example of a market approach to education. Traditionally, only those who hail from wealthy families, and presumably considerable political and social influence, have the resources to attend such schools, which naturally position them to succeed within an American political economy based largely on meritocracy. This market approach can even be viewed within the public school system as certain schools, often those located in affluent areas and comprised of predominately White student bodies, are allowed to thrive while other schools, often located in inner-cities or rural areas with high percentages of students of color, are allowed to continually fail to meet high academic standards. No Child Left Behind and other accountability reforms, enacted under the veil of providing equitable opportunities to students in failing schools, have only exacerbated the existing divide between haves and have-nots by providing additional measures to showcase the educational disparity between these two groups (Hursh 2007; Ladson-Billings 2006).

Too often, students' social positioning, particularly with respect to race and socioeconomic status, unwillingly places them within this competitive environment through the type of schools they attend and how they are taught (Anyon 1981; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). From a civic standpoint, Kahne and Middaugh (2008) report that White students are significantly more likely than other groups to receive what they consider a quality civic education, one that provides opportunities to discuss current political events, engage in service learning, and simulate civic processes in addition to learning about local, state, and federal governments. African American and Latino students, on the other hand, are more likely to have traditional civics and government

courses that are devoid of political discussions and opportunities for civic engagement outside of the classroom. This type of differentiation produces what Anyon (1981) terms reproductive knowledge, or knowledge that contributes to the perpetuation of existing political and power structures. In other words, disparities in civic education, whether they occur along racial or socioeconomic lines, do little to narrow the democracy divide (Hess 2008) in the United States or temper ever-increasing levels of political ignorance and ambivalence among the American electorate (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002).

Of particular interest to this study is whether the political instruction that students receive at school is affected by their perceived academic ability and future sociopolitical status. In other words, this study seeks to better understand how teachers conceptualize and enact political instruction based on the demographics of the students in their classrooms. Specifically, I wanted to observe whether teachers appear to teach about politics and political events from a neoliberal standpoint in that they cater their political instruction to the perceived political and economic abilities of their students, which are based on factors such as academic ability, race, and socioeconomic status. Of course, how teachers present their political instruction may ultimately impact the ways in which their students conceptualize politics and their role in the political process, which Foucault (1991) would argue is one way in which schools act as apparatuses of security within a neoliberal society. By observing government classes in three demographically diverse schools during coverage of a presidential election, an event that Haas and Laughlin (2002) describe as "the quintessential example of teaching social studies" (20), I was able to monitor each class during an abnormally high level of political interest among both the teachers and students, which provided a rich context from which to analyze the political messages being given at each school.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The study took place in 2008, from the start of school in August through the election in November. All three schools are located in the Southwest Chicago suburbs in a county that voted for Obama by a 56% margin on Election Day. Each school, however, caters to decidedly different communities and student populations. In total, I observed six government teachers at the three schools. At the two smaller schools, I was able to observe every government teacher at the school; at the largest school, Roosevelt, I chose three teachers who seemed committed to teaching the election and whose classes did not conflict with others that I was observing. In the following, I provide a more detailed description of each of the schools and teachers in the study, and Table 1 gives basic demographic data about each of the teachers and their classes.

Roosevelt High School

Roosevelt is located in a major urban area and has an enrollment of over 2,500 students. The school caters to a predominately working-class community, and, at the time of the study, over 30% of its students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. The student population at Roosevelt was 43% Latino, 29% African American, and 27% White. The school struggled in several areas of academic achievement that often plague urban schools (Fine 1991); in particular, Roosevelt only graduated 70% of its students, and the state had identified the school for an improvement plan after repeated years of not achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) in multiple subgroups. In addition, when comparing American College Testing (ACT) results of Roosevelt students with other students in Illinois, Roosevelt falls below both state and district averages in all academic areas. Surveys of freshmen and seniors at Roosevelt suggest that the student body leaned strongly Democratic and overwhelmingly favored Obama in the election.

Civics was a required course for freshmen at Roosevelt, and each of the three Roosevelt teachers that participated in the study taught civics exclusively. Two of the teachers, Ms. Wilkinson and Mr. Harrison, taught regular-level courses. The third class was a lower-level, cotaught class headed by Ms. Jackson that contained a large number of special education students. As Table 1 shows, the demographics of the students in these classes mirrored that of the total student population.

TABLE 1
Teacher and Student Demographics

Teacher	School	Ethnicity	Teaching Experience	Class Demographics
Ms. Wilkinson	Roosevelt	White	First year	24 Students: 7 White, 6 African American, 11 Latino
Mr. Harrison	Roosevelt	African American	Less than 5 years	24 Students: 3 White, 3 African American, 18 Latino
Ms. Jackson	Roosevelt	White	Less than 10 years	26 Students: 7 White, 7 African American, 12 Latino
Mr. Ryan	Armstrong	White	Less than 10 years	21 Students: All White
Mr. Pierce	St. Thomas	White	Over 40 years	7 Students: All White
Mr. Leander	St. Thomas	White	Over 30 years	17 Students: All White

Armstrong High School

Armstrong is the only high school in a small town approximately 20 miles outside of the city where Roosevelt is located and serves a predominately rural community. The total enrollment at Armstrong at the time of the study was around 600 students, 95% of whom were White. The school had a 93% graduation rate, and Armstrong students performed at or slightly better than state ACT averages in all academic subjects. The school did not meet AYP goals in 2007, but the state had not identified Armstrong for a school improvement plan based on their prior academic performance. Student surveys suggest that the student body leaned Democratic and favored Obama, but not to the extent that they did at Roosevelt.

Mr. Ryan was the only government teacher at Armstrong. His class was a regular-level course comprised mainly of seniors who were all White and appeared to represent the middle-class community that surrounded the school.

St. Thomas

St. Thomas is a private school affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church that is located less than five miles away from Roosevelt. Students must apply for admission to the school, and the annual tuition is nearly \$8,000 per student. At the time of my observations, the school serviced over 900 students, only 5% of whom were students of color. St. Thomas was widely recognized in the area for having a stellar academic reputation, which was buoyed by their 100% graduation rate and the fact that many of their alumni attend prestigious universities. In addition, the average ACT scores of St. Thomas students were considerably higher than state and national averages. The school also strongly adhered to its Catholic mission; classes started with prayers, and religious artifacts adorned the hallways. Finally, St. Thomas was the only school whose student body did not seem to have a clear political ideology. Surveys of freshmen suggest that they leaned slightly to the left side of the political spectrum and seniors appeared to favor McCain and the Republican Party, although the responses were almost evenly divided in both cases.

Government at St. Thomas was taught by Mr. Pierce and Mr. Leander, both veteran teachers with over 30 years of experience. The former taught the lowest-level government courses at the school; Mr. Leander's class was the only section of advanced placement (AP) Government offered that semester. Both classes contained predominately seniors and were representative of the student body as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

Using a multiple case study design (Stake 1995), I was able to interact with the teachers and students at each school through a variety of means. The primary method of data collection came from my observations as a participant-observer (Merriam 1998) at each school. On average, I observed each class three to four times per week in the three months prior to the election. These observations were triangulated with additional data obtained through semistructured teacher and student interviews, student surveys, and artifact collection.

I formally interviewed each teacher twice, once at the beginning of the study and again after the election. The first interview served to gain a better understanding of the teacher's personal political beliefs, attitudes toward teaching politics, and overall plan of instruction as it related to the presidential election. The second interview asked the teachers to reflect on their coverage of the election in class. Also after the election, I interviewed all students from each class who volunteered to take part in the study. These student interviews were shorter, and I asked them to evaluate their teacher's coverage of the election throughout the semester. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy.³

Finally, I used student surveys to gain a better understanding of the political climate at each school, as well as the initial political knowledge and dispositions of the students in each of the six classes I observed. In early September, I gave the survey to large numbers of seniors and freshmen in each building to assess with which, if any, political party students associated themselves and whether the student body appeared to favor a particular candidate in the election.⁴ I also used the same survey in each of the six classes I observed to better assess their level of political understanding and interest in the election at the beginning of the semester.

FINDINGS

Based on my initial interview with the teachers, it was clear that they recognized the historical and social implications of the election, and each planned on including the election within their classroom instruction.⁵ Each of the teachers achieved this goal throughout the semester, although to varying degrees due to the constant pressure placed on some of the teachers to ensure their students passed an end- of-course exam that held graduation implications (for greater detail, see Journell 2010b). Although the type of political instruction that students received in class is the focal point of this study, it is important to first note the level of political awareness students possessed prior to entering their government classes, as that information will aid in understanding the neoliberal undertones found in each class.

Students' Initial Interest and Understanding of Politics and the Election

Based on the data I obtained at the beginning of the semester, it appears that many of the students came to their government classes with minimal exposure to politics and the election. Table 2 shows the results of the initial student surveys in each class.

These survey results suggest that the students in Mr. Leander's AP class at St. Thomas may have had a greater working knowledge of politics upon entering their government course than the other students in this study. Based on the noticeable discrepancy between their scores on the items pertaining to following and discussing politics outside of school, it appears that Mr. Leander's students had at least been exposed to politics and political discussions more frequently than the students in the other classes. In addition, the relatively high numbers of students, particularly at Roosevelt and Armstrong, who were unsure of their political affiliation, suggests that they may not have entered the semester with a clear grasp of partisan politics.

Many of the comments made by students in their interviews at the conclusion of the study also support this notion. As Katherine, one of Mr. Ryan's students at Armstrong, confessed, "I couldn't have told you what a Republican was [prior to class]. I couldn't have told you anything other than I think Bush is stupid." These types of comments made by students at Roosevelt and Armstrong typically contrasted with the responses I received from students in Mr. Leander's class. Although there were students in the AP class who professed to knowing little about politics, such as Nancy who admitted that she "didn't even know that blue was Democrat," they appeared to be in the minority. Most of Mr. Leander's students gave comments that suggested a fair amount of political exposure outside of school, as exemplified by Tommy who stated, "When you are at home, you hear more of the conservative view, what is bad about Barack, what is good about McCain, and you come [to class] and you hear the complete opposite."

TABLE 2
Survey Responses by Class

Survey Item	Roosevelt			Armstrong	St. Thomas	
	Wilkinson	Harrison	Jackson	Ryan	Pierce	Leander
I consider politics important	2.69 (1.29)	3.12 (1.29)	3.68 (1.08)	3.30 (1.03)	4.00 (1.00)	4.17 (1.01)
I pay attention to politics and current events	1.87 (1.01)	2.16 (1.00)	2.45 (1.01)	2.15 (0.81)	2.20 (0.83)	3.23 (0.97)
I consider myself knowledgeable about politics	1.91 (1.08)	2.16 (1.30)	1.95 (1.13)	2.05 (0.88)	2.00 (1.41)	2.70 (0.98)
I enjoy discussing politics with others	1.73 (0.91)	2.04 (1.30)	1.27 (0.55)	2.15 (1.08)	2.40 (1.14)	3.41 (1.27)
I often talk about politics with my family and friends	1.69 (1.06)	2.16 (1.20)	1.72 (1.03)	2.40 (0.88)	1.60 (0.89)	3.11 (1.45)
I enjoy discussing current political events in school	2.04 (1.29)	2.12 (1.19)	2.04 (1.32)	3.10 (1.37)	3.00 (1.58)	3.76 (1.20)
I think following politics is important to being a good citizen	2.43 (1.34)	2.58 (1.13)	3.18 (1.25)	2.70 (1.03)	3.00 (1.22)	3.76 (1.09)
I have paid attention to coverage of the 2008 Presidential Election	2.30 (1.25)	2.41 (1.28)	2.77 (1.37)	2.20 (1.19)	2.40 (1.14)	3.70 (1.10)
I plan on following the Presidential Election this fall	2.43 (1.53)	2.50 (1.41)	2.31 (1.42)	2.35 (1.13)	3.20 (1.78)	4.17 (1.18)
I feel strongly about who should win the 2008 Presidential Election	3.60 (1.46)	3.41 (1.55)	3.36 (1.52)	2.55 (1.31)	3.20 (2.04)	3.47 (1.37)
I consider myself (political party)						
Democrat (D)	(D) 7	(D) 8	(D) 7	(D) 4	(D) 2	(D) 3
Republican (R)	(R) 0	(R) 3	(R) 4	(R) 3	(R) 0	(R) 4
Unsure (U)	(U) 13	(U) 9	(U) 8	(U) 13	(U) 3	(U) 5
Neither (N)	(N) 3	(N) 4	(N) 2	(N) 0	(N) 0	(N) 5
I would vote for (candidate)						
McCain (M)	(M) 0	(M) 4	(M) 2	(M) 3	(M) 1	(M) 6
Obama (O)	(O) 17	(O) 13	(O) 15	(O) 10	(O) 2	(O) 5
Another Candidate (A)	(A) 0	(A) 0	(A) 0	(A) 0	(A) 0	(A) 1
Undecided (U)	(U) 2	(U) 4	(U) 4	(U) 3	(U) 2	(U) 5
Would Not Vote (NV)	(NV) 4	(NV) 3	(NV) 1	(NV) 4	(NV) 0	(NV) 0

Note. For the first 10 items, the mean for each statement is given, with the standard deviation in parentheses.

The answers to the two open-ended survey questions also suggest that most of the students entered the school year with minimal, and often superficial, knowledge of the two candidates.⁶ Even though the questions did not specifically ask students to write policy positions of either candidate, few students attempted to include policy aspects in their comments. Those that did often wrote some variation of generic policy platforms. For example, the common policy knowledge about Obama was that he "wanted change," "wanted out of Iraq," and "wanted lower taxes." Likewise, McCain was labeled as "wanting to stay in the war," and "will follow Bush." Mr. Leander's class appeared slightly more knowledgeable on the outset, collectively writing more about policy than any of the other classes. However, most of the responses echoed the ones already mentioned, along with the candidates' stances on moral issues, such as abortion, stem-cell research, and gay marriage.

The vast majority of student responses focused on physical or biographical descriptions of the candidates. Obama was frequently described as African American, young, married, a father, from Illinois, a good speaker, and hailing from a biracial family. Conversely, McCain was portrayed as White, old, married, a father, a senator, and a war hero/prisoner of war. Other responses echoed sound bites from the primary campaigns, such as Obama "has a big mouth priest," "sucks at bowling," and "is a Bears fan," while McCain "owns four houses," "had to go to the hospital for something," and "can't lift his arms above his head." A few students made blanket statements about the candidates without justifying their rationale, such as proclaiming that Obama "is amazing" or "the president that we need" or that McCain "will probably win this election."

Again, the student interviews support this lack of initial knowledge of the candidates. As Melissa from Mr. Harrison's class at Roosevelt stated, "I mean I knew who was running. For a while I thought it was Hillary Clinton versus Obama for president." Charlotte, a student in Mr. Ryan's class at Armstrong, admitted, "I just knew his name was Barack Obama. I didn't even know the other guy's name." She continued by telling me that she had liked Obama prior to coming to class, but that "I didn't really know anything about him; I just thought he was cuter."

Although these survey results and student comments indicate that most of the students, with the possible exception of Mr. Leander's AP class, lacked sophisticated knowledge of politics and the candidates at the beginning of the semester, it appears that the majority of students were interested in the outcome of the election, however. Students in each of the six classes gave relatively high scores on the survey to statements touting the importance of politics as a function of civic engagement, and scores for the statement asking students whether they felt strongly about which candidate should win the election were particularly high for all classes. In addition, the students appeared more assertive when asked which candidate they preferred, suggesting that they did have a vested interest in a certain candidate even if they did not know much about his political platform.

Observations throughout the semester also suggest that students at each school had developed opinions on the election and many of the major issues being debated by the two candidates, as the following conversation from Ms. Jackson's class at Roosevelt shows:

Tony:

So McCain wants to stay in the war?

Author:

Yeah, he wants to stay in until we win.

Tony:

That is what I think too. We have spent a lot of money on Iraq, and if we leave, it will all go down the drain.

Author:

Well, that is what McCain believes, that we have spent all of this money and lost all of these lives, that if we leave it will all be for nothing.

Tony:

Plus, if we win we will own Iraq and can make it part of the United States.

Author:

Well, I don't know if we are going to do that, but hopefully they will be friendly with us at least.

Edgar:

Being in the army is a career, right?

Author:

Yeah, it can be.

Jim:

They just don't make you fight.

Author:

Right, you can have a desk job when you get older.

Edgar:

That is what my cousin does.

Author:

That's cool. Is he over in Iraq?

Edgar:

Yeah. Obama wants to end the war right?

Author:

Yeah, I think he said he wants all troops out within 16 months of when he takes office.

Edgar:

That is why I want him to win; I might get to see my cousin again.

Clearly, these students had opinions on the war, and, in the case of Edgar, seemed to have a personal stake in the election. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that most of the students were aware and fairly interested in the election, even if they may have lacked a nuanced understanding of the issues being discussed by the candidates. Moreover, the possibility of electing the first African American president or female vice-president had students at all three schools intrigued about the larger social ramifications of the election. In other words, the teachers in this study had a unique opportunity to teach about politics during a time in which current events had both piqued students' interest and made the curriculum applicable to real-life events. The remainder of this section presents findings that show how the teachers responded to this opportunity and illustrate how their instruction fit within a neoliberal governmentality framework.

Local Versus National Emphasis

At Roosevelt, conversations about the election focused almost exclusively at the local level, specifically, how the outcome of the election would affect students' families and the surrounding neighborhood. In many ways, this approach was consistent with what seemed to be a larger theme of civic responsibility that permeated throughout the school. In each of the classes I observed at Roosevelt, the first three weeks of instruction focused exclusively on the definition and responsibilities of good citizenship. Although informed voting was always mentioned, the crux of these discussions reiterated the need to participate in one's community, either through volunteering, participating in local affairs, or simply obeying the law. Students were also constantly reminded of their community service obligation and were encouraged to start the process early so they would not overwhelm themselves during their senior year.⁷

The teachers at Roosevelt seemed to adhere to this philosophy as well. When I asked each of them to provide a definition of civic education, all focused their answer on their students' immediate community. Ms. Wilkinson responded by saying, "Just knowing their responsibility to be good citizens and contributing to society and just volunteering and knowing that is part of their duties as citizens." Ms. Jackson stated that the main element of civic education was to "teach students to be responsible and be respectful and accepting of their city and accept different people." Mr. Harrison defined citizenship as being a productive member of society, but he also added that students should be made civically aware and gave the following example from his instruction:

A lot of times we will go outside, like during the fall we might go outside and we may walk around a little bit, and they have a mission that is located on one side [of the school] and a shelter on the other side over here. Just across the bridge, maybe two to three miles, there are \$500,000 homes.... So I kind of try to use real life things, things that are in their environment, yet not stop there because I want them to have other points of reference, but to make that connection so they can grab hold of it with something that they see every day.

Each of the teachers appeared to make a deliberate effort to focus their instruction at this local level. For example, when each of the teachers described the differences between the two major parties, they always made a point to emphasize Democrats' willingness to give money to social programs, and they often cited the various facilities located in their students' communities. Similarly, Mr. Harrison repeatedly told his students that good citizens should always make informed decisions in political elections, which he described as first looking at one's family situation and then focusing on what was best for the nation overall.

Perhaps as a result of this focused instruction, students in the three Roosevelt classes seemed to conceptualize politics from this local standpoint. When asked who they would vote for or which political issues were most important to them, nearly all of the students I interviewed described their preferences in local terms. For example, Jessica stated that she preferred Obama because "he wants to lower taxes for poor people." Emilio expressed similar concerns when he justified his choice of Obama with "because my family [is] struggling right now and we need a change in the community." Another student, Sarah, was more specific when asked what issues were the most important to her. She stated, "Taxes definitely because I am not really an upper-class person, and so taxes is a big thing. And gas [prices] because my dad works kind of far away; he wakes up at

4:00 in the morning to go to work." Finally, Melissa's comment suggests that, for her, local concerns did, indeed, trump larger national issues. She explained her choice of candidate by saying, "For a while I thought McCain was better because I am pro-life, but I realized which one would be better for my family."

Conversely, the political focus of the teachers at Armstrong and St. Thomas catered to a more national approach. For example, Mr. Pierce at St. Thomas gave his students daily current event handouts comprised of articles from *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Chicago Sun Times* that almost exclusively focused on national and international issues. Similarly, when Mr. Ryan assigned his students at Armstrong to find articles on local, state, and national issues for their weekly current event discussions, he would often assign three students to national news and only one apiece to state and local. In general, the approach at both schools with respect to the election was from a national perspective, and all of the teachers encouraged their students to make informed decisions based on who they believed was best for the nation as a whole. Mr. Pierce even went so far as to say to his students who were uneasy supporting Obama simply because of his pro-choice stance, "It is like I have said before, do you pick a candidate based on how they stand on one issue, or how they stand on 10 issues? I am not saying one is right or not, but it is something to think about. If you agree with Obama on 9 of 10 things, but disagree with him on abortion, do you not vote for him?"

In his AP class, Mr. Leander focused exclusively on national events, even telling his students to ignore state and local issues for the purposes of his class. Not surprisingly, then, his election coverage centered on the political strategies of the two campaigns and the ramifications of the outcome. Mr. Leander was fond of telling his students that the only issue of any consequence for voters in the election was each candidate's philosophy for choosing Supreme Court justices. During one of his speeches on the issue, Mr. Leander told his students, "I am going to tell you the true key to this election, which you can then go home and tell your parents, because they are probably ignorant on this issue like most Americans. The only hardball issue in this election is who they will put on the Supreme Court. Policy in this country is decided by five people on the Court at any given time, and that, boys and girls, is the only thing that matters. Everything else, guns, abortion, war, taxes, they are all softball issues."

This philosophical difference among the schools can also be seen in St. Thomas and Armstrong students' responses to questions about the election when compared to the aforementioned comments made by students at Roosevelt. When asked about the pivotal issues that swayed their decision on whom to support in the election, students at these two schools often focused their answers on lofty initiatives aimed at the nation as a whole. One of Mr. Ryan's students at Armstrong, Curtis, said that he supported Obama because "the economy, I want him to fix that because I know that is screwed up right now . . . and the war has been annoying, been too long. So I think that will end faster through Obama." Another of Mr. Ryan's students, Elizabeth, also supported Obama, but because of "the national health thing. I think that is a good idea, just for the people who don't have it. I think they should." One of Mr. Leander's students at St. Thomas, Brian, even seemed to put national interests ahead of personal gain when he said he preferred McCain because, "When I look at our family situation too, it wasn't just because we have less than \$250,000, so our taxes wouldn't have been raised, but I just think [McCain's economic plan] is a better way for the economy to make more jobs because Democrats, in my opinion, just give money to people and say 'do whatever you want with it,' and most of the people are not going to make the right decisions with it, I don't think."

Varying Levels of Political Discussion

Closely related to the local and national emphasis placed on the election at the various schools was the lack of sustained discussion given to politics at Roosevelt, and to a lesser extent Mr. Pierce's class at St. Thomas, compared to Mr. Ryan's class at Armstrong and Mr. Leander's AP class at St. Thomas. In this sense, I am using the term politics to describe the strategic maneuvers used by each side in an attempt win the election. In other words, the verbal sparring, calculated decisions, and attention to popular opinion that ultimately decides the outcome of elections.

The classes at Roosevelt were virtually devoid of any political discussions of this nature. Major events, such as McCain's decision to temporarily suspend his campaign before the first debate or Obama spending millions of dollars to buy 30 minutes of uninterrupted airtime, were never discussed. When events, such as the selection of running mates, were mentioned, these teachers rarely asked their students why they thought a certain decision was made. The Roosevelt teachers rarely engaged their students in substantive political conversations, even when they were initiated by their students. For example, during a discussion about voting rights in Ms. Wilkinson's class, a student asked her, "Which candidate is trying to bring the troops home?" to which Ms. Wilkinson ended the discussion by replying, "Neither has said a timetable" and moving on with her regularly-scheduled lesson. A similar instance occurred after the third debate when a student asked Ms. Wilkinson who had won. Instead of asking students whether they had watched or attempting to discuss issues from the debate, she simply stated, "It depends. Both sides claimed victory."

Even when these teachers explicitly tried to elicit discussions of politics, they often had trouble managing the discussion in a way that allowed students to substantively participate. For example, at the start of her unit on political parties, Ms. Jackson divided her class into small groups that would rotate to different parts of the room and discuss thought provoking questions, such as "Who do you believe will win the presidential election, and why?" and "Hypothesize how our country could have been different had President Bush not been elected." However, she only allowed each group three to four minutes at each station, barely enough time for them to read each question and begin the discussion process. Unfortunately, this activity was the only one of its kind in Ms. Jackson's class during the semester.

Similar types of political discussion occurred in Mr. Pierce's lower-level class at St. Thomas. Mr. Pierce regularly alerted his students to many of the political aspects of the election during his daily portion of class dedicated to current events, but he rarely allowed time for his students to engage in sustained discussions of the election or politics. With such a small class, he often felt compelled to ask each student his or her opinion directly. A typical exchange went as follows:

Mr. Pierce (going around the room):

How will you feel if Obama wins?

Mandy:

(No answer, shrugs shoulders)

Peter:

I don't have a problem with either [candidate].

Jimmy:

I think, especially down South, there will be anger, which worries me. I think there will be a chance he gets assassinated.

Mr. Pierce:

But McCain you are OK with?

Jimmy:

I like McCain.

Jack:

I don't think it will be a problem either way. I like McCain.

At this point, the conversation would end, and Mr. Pierce would continue with the lesson for the day. Based on these types of exchanges, it appeared that Mr. Pierce believed that if his students were talking, then they were engaged in a productive conversation. Yet, in this particular dialogue, none of the students really answered Mr. Pierce's initial question, and when a potentially controversial comment was introduced by Jimmy, Mr. Pierce seemed not to notice and redirected the question to McCain instead of exploring why Jimmy thought Obama's life might be in jeopardy.

In addition, Mr. Pierce often failed to engage his students in analytical discussions about politics or the election even when his students showed initiative and watched election coverage on their own, similar to the

aforementioned vignettes from Ms. Wilkinson's class at Roosevelt. In one rather poignant example during the Democratic Convention, one of Mr. Pierce's students, Mandy, came to class early and told him, "I tried watching the Hillary Clinton speech, but I didn't understand it. I know she was talking about Obama." When class started, Mr. Pierce addressed an article about Clinton nailing her speech, but he never directly explained why the speech was a success, nor did he ever ask Mandy to explain the issues that had confused her.

In contrast, Mr. Ryan's class at Armstrong and Mr. Leander's class at St. Thomas were devoted to in-depth discussions of politics on a regular basis. For example, during the first week of class after Obama had named Biden as his running mate, Mr. Ryan had the following exchange with his students:

Mr. Ryan:

Why do you think Obama picked someone who has been in government so long if he is promising change?

Student:

More experience.

Mr. Ryan:

Right, one of the knocks on Obama is that he is inexperienced. What about the fact that Biden had criticized Obama during the primaries, do you think that could be a problem?

Student:

There could be friction between the two, although it might not be that bad since both were trying to get elected.

Mr. Ryan:

Yeah, and if I was McCain, I would run an ad that uses Biden to criticize Obama. Also, Biden is on the Senate foreign relations committee. Why do you think that might have been influential in his decision?

Student:

We are at war.

Mr. Ryan:

Right, and Obama does not have a lot of foreign policy experience.

These types of political exchanges occurred throughout the semester, and as his students began to feel more comfortable discussing political issues in class, Mr. Ryan increasingly took the position of a moderator that helped facilitate rather than dominate the discussion. A typical example of this approach occurred before the first presidential debate:

Mr. Ryan:

What is supposed to happen tonight?

Several students:

The debate. Barry:

My dad said they put their campaign on hold because of the economy.

Mr. Ryan: Who is they?

Several students:

McCain. Mr. Ryan:

He said something needs to be fixed with the economy before they spend time on politics and debate. Obama said its only an hour and a half and that a president needs to be able to balance more than one thing at a time. What do you think?

Charlotte:

I think they should debate.

Ruth:

Our class is only an hour and a half; I mean, it's not that long.

Mr. Ryan:

Yeah, and it's not like these guys can't get flights. What if McCain doesn't show up? Will it hurt him?

Several students:

Yeah.

Mr. Ryan:

Yeah, I see where he is coming from, but I think most Americans will see this as being scared to debate and will probably hurt him. I am guessing that he will show up.

Charlotte:

Does McCain think the country will go into recession in an hour and a half?

Mr. Ryan:

Well, McCain says we need to be doing our job, although when you are a senator running for president, you aren't going to be doing your day job anyway.

Elizabeth:

The other way to look at it is to show up and prove why you deserve the job.

Mr. Ryan:

That is a good point. So I guess we will see what he does.

However, none of the teachers in this study, Mr. Ryan included, reached the level of political discourse that occurred on a regular basis in Mr. Leander's AP class. He treated the campaign as a game of chess, and always ended discussion of particular events by stating what the next move for each candidate might entail. Mr. Leander also emphasized electoral strategy far more than any of the other teachers. An example of the depth of political analysis that occurred in his class can be seen in the following excerpt from a lecture near the conclusion of the election:

We seem to have a conflict between history and the current election. Normally, history says that the race will tighten up as it gets closer to Election Day, but this one seems to be getting wider, although there are 13 days left. For the first time nationally, Obama hit double digits. This means that even if McCain holds his share of voters and gets all the independents he would still lose. He needs to get it under 50 percent to have a chance. If you look at the Electoral College and the McCain activity in recent days, it is already over. He pulled out of Michigan a few weeks ago, and he got ripped by his party, and even his own running mate, Sarah Palin, ripped him for it. Yet he just moved out of Iowa, New Mexico, and Colorado, which indicates that Obama has a sizeable lead there, which would put him at 27T and It's already won. So what does McCain need to do? He has to take a state that Obama already has and they have set their sights on Pennsylvania. There are four problems with that. First he is starting 10 points behind. He has Hillary to deal with, and she is extremely popular there. Then there is Bill, who is even more popular than Hillary. Finally, he has to deal with Joe Biden, who was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania. So you may be asking, why Pennsylvania? Because it is more likely than the other big blue states, California, New York, and Illinois.

This type of political analysis from Mr. Leander occurred throughout the semester and was always preceded by an open forum from which students could ask questions and raise comments. Unlike Mr. Ryan, however, Mr. Leander never seemed to relinquish his role as political expert, and, as a result, his students often directed their questions and comments at him, rather than within the larger group. The following is a typical exchange from this class:

Student:

Bill Clinton gave a speech last night.

Mr. Leander:

All of the people did their job. The vice president's job is to attack. Kerry did the same thing. Biden ripped the Republican agenda. Clinton did what he was supposed to do; he endorsed Obama and compared Obama to himself in the 1992 campaign. It was a passing of the torch so to speak. The Republicans have a difficult task. They have structural issues they need to work out. The religious right does not like McCain and vice versa.

Student:

Hillary Clinton released her delegates.

Mr. Leander:

They don't have to vote for Obama, but she recommended it.

Student:

People are mad about how they set up Mile High Stadium.

Mr. Leander:

People are mad about the stadium? I hadn't heard that.

Student:

Are the Republicans going to stay inside?

Mr. Leander:

It will be in St. Paul, and it will unfold the same way. The first day will be the McCain family. A couple differences, I would be surprised if President Bush is there because he is so unpopular. Republicans have been trying to run away from him.

Student:

It is unfair how they keep saying McCain is going to be another term of President Bush. They are two different people even though they have some of the same values. Mr. Leander:

Did you say fair? What does that have to do with politics? This is hardball, none of that sissy softball stuff. That is why negative campaigning seems to work.

Student:

You think Hillary will run again in four or eight years?

Mr. Leander:

She put herself back in the game at the convention. If Obama loses, she will probably be the nominee in four years. In eight years, she might be too old.

As this example shows, every student comment was directed at Mr. Leander, a practice that continued the entire semester. An explicit example of Mr. Leander's political authority in the classroom occurred after McCain's vice presidential selection. One of the students stated that Palin's 17-year-old daughter was pregnant, prompting another student to quickly blurt out, "Why does it matter?" A third student quickly responded by saying, "Let's just let Mr. Leander talk!" Mr. Leander then gave his opinion and never came back to address the question that was raised about the applicability of the pregnant daughter to Palin's qualifications for vice president.

Based on the description of these six classes, it seems clear that the quality of political instruction that students received was not equal. Returning briefly to the two student comments that prefaced this article, it is not surprising that Tommy appeared to have a better grasp of electoral politics than Emilio given the disparity between the levels of political discourse that occurred in Tommy's AP class at St. Thomas, compared to Emilio's class at Roosevelt. Again, it is important to note that both students, like the majority of students in this study, were interested in the outcome of the election. Why, then, were the political messages and opportunities for political discourse that students received in each of the six classes and the three schools so different? While many factors may have played into this disparity, I posit that each of these teachers was unknowingly participating within a neoliberal governmentality framework by providing their students with the political knowledge deemed necessary for them based on their perceived sociopolitical abilities and interests.

DISCUSSION

Given the qualitative nature of this study, I hesitate to overgeneralize these findings and acknowledge that the differences in the political instruction found in the six classes could simply be attributed to varying degrees of teaching prowess. At first glance, one could make the argument that Mr. Pierce and the three Roosevelt teachers were simply poor teachers who missed a golden opportunity to engage their students in the political process. However, in the three months in which I observed them, I found each of these four teachers to be professionals who genuinely cared for their students' academic success, employed a variety of learning strategies in their classes, utilized technology, and engaged in a variety of other activities that would typically be used to describe "good" social studies instruction. Conversely, Mr. Leander, who provided his students the greatest depth of political analysis of any teacher in the study, used a lecture-dominant instructional style that would make any methods professor wince. In other words, to say that teaching ability led to the disparity of political instruction found in this study would ignore the larger institutional influences that may have had a greater impact. A critical race theory perspective offers another possible explanation because the majority of classes that provided superficial coverage of politics, particularly at the national level, were located in a school with a large

contingent of people of color, but the two predominately White schools appeared to offer their students more analytical political coverage. Certainly, race and socioeconomic status are always intertwined with discussions of power in education (Delpit 1988; Ladson- Billings and Tate 1995), and these findings are consistent with prior research that suggests that African American and Latino students tend to receive substandard civic education (Kahne and Middaugh 2008). Yet, focusing just on race and socioeconomic status does not explain the difference between the often superficial coverage of the election in Mr. Pierce's class, which was comprised entirely of White and, presumably, upper-class students, and the in-depth analysis offered by Mr. Ryan and Mr. Leander in their respective classes. Rather, I argue that these findings are reminiscent of Litt's (1963) study in that the political instruction given by the teachers appeared linked to the perceived sociopolitical statuses of their students and their future civic abilities and interests.

From a neoliberal govern mentality perspective, all three schools were acting as apparatuses of security (Foucault 1991) in the sense that they used their political instruction to better prepare their students for the political involvement they would likely engage in as adults. At Roosevelt, where the majority of students came from working-class homes and college was far from a birthright, the political emphasis was on local issues in part because it was widely believed that many of their students would spend a majority of their life within that same community. However, the students in Mr. Pierce's class had the financial means to leave their local community, perhaps prompting the national approach that was common to both classes at St. Thomas. Yet, his students' lower-level distinction seemed to deter Mr. Pierce from believing that they could reach an analytical understanding of politics, instead striving for a conversational awareness that could be gleaned from reading newspaper headlines. Then, of course, are the classes taught by Mr. Ryan and Mr. Leander comprised of middle- to upper-class students, the majority of whom would attend college after graduation. The instruction given by both teachers seemed to implicitly assume that their students needed a rich understanding of politics, particularly in Mr. Leander's AP class, where the students were presumed to have both the financial means and academic ability to not only understand politics, but also shape policy in the future. This aspect of the study reflects Harvey's (2005) notion that neoliberalism favors rule by societal elites, and it stands to reason that a neoliberal educational system would provide a richer civic education to those students who are perceived to have the greatest opportunity to exert political influence as adults.

What truly made each teacher's instruction an example of governmentality, however, was the transparency by which it was achieved. As agents of security, educators wield considerable influence over society, a fact that is widely recognized (e.g. Counts 1932; Dewey 1916; Rugg 1933). Contrary to Counts, who believes that teachers should acknowledge and embrace their positions of power for the betterment of society, Foucault (1991) would argue that schools are considerably more powerful apparatuses of security precisely because teachers often do not recognize the scope of their influence. For example, all of the teachers recognized the need to include politics into their curriculum, particularly coverage of this election that had captured their student's' interests, yet none of them explicitly stated they had to teach it a certain way based on their students' socioeconomic status or potential political influence. Instead, these various approaches just seemed to happen naturally out of each teacher's desire to make their curriculum relevant to their students' surroundings and civic development, a process that is as efficient as it is transparent. As long as school personnel continue to make curricular decisions based on what they perceive to be beneficial or relevant to their students, this subjectivity will ensure that certain students are privileged to certain content while others are cared for in kind (Popkewitz and Brennan 1998).

This transparent subjectivity is also what Foucault (1980a) would consider true societal power, one that "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, their learning processes and everyday lives" (39). For a government driven by population, this type of power is advantageous in that all members of society are constantly governing each other and advancing the political economy without fear of state-induced oppression (Foucault 1991). However, from an educational perspective, how are we to feel about this neoliberal approach, particularly as it relates to political instruction? For an answer to that question, I refer to Foucault (1984) who, in describing the ramifications of power, states that "everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad" (343).

Consider, for example, the local approach to politics advocated at Roosevelt. On one hand, such an approach could be commended in that it is adapting the curriculum so that students can "see themselves" within the scope of the political discussions held in class, which, according to Anyon (1981), does not occur enough in schools that cater to students from working-class families. Further, the local approach prepares students to become engaged in a political system they are most likely going to participate in as adults. Given that the community surrounding Roosevelt is comprised largely of working-class families who do not have the educational attainment or social networking that research suggests is essential to obtain political influence in society (Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996); one could even make the argument that by preparing students to conceptualize politics at a local level, the Roosevelt teachers were actually positioning their students to shape public policy as adults.

On the other hand, I believe educators tread on dangerous ground when they make decisions about the needs of students that are predicated on assumptions of perceived academic ability or social relevance. Particularly during such a historic event as the 2008 Presidential Election, all students should have been privy to the level of political analysis that occurred in Mr. Leander's AP class. Certainly, local issues are important, especially in tight-knit communities, but so, too, are national politics. The students at Roosevelt appeared to have a vested interest in the outcome of the election, but instead of cultivating that interest into an appreciation and better understanding of national political processes, the instruction that they received in their government classes suggested that they were powerless to affect national politics and that their only course of action as adults would be to vote and hope that their elected officials cater to their individual and community needs. This approach also does little to change the ever-growing ambivalence and distrust toward national politics in the United States, particularly among 18- to 25-year-olds who are regularly the least politically active voting bloc in all levels of politics (Campbell 2005; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Lopez, Kirby, and Sagoff 2005). Again, based on Harvey's (2005) definition, this type of intellectual segregation is characteristic of neoliberalism in that neoliberal theorists believe democratic access to political and economic information is potentially damaging to society. If only elites are given access to such information, then they can use that knowledge to ensure the continuation of an economically productive society.

Perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of this study, however, at least from an educational standpoint, is the way in which students in the lower-level classes were dismissed as either lacking sufficient interest in the election or unable to understand the nuances of national politics. Unfortunately, it is likely that the political instruction that occurred in the lower-level classes in this study is similar to what occurs in lower-level social studies classes across the United States on a regular basis, which is particularly troubling given the amount of research that suggests that students enjoy and positively respond to discussions of political or controversial topics in their classes (Hess 2009; Hess and Posselt 2002). As the survey results found in Table 2 show, students in all six classes were highly interested in the outcome of the election, yet their prior exposure to politics, both inside and outside of school, tended to be correlated with their academic status. In other words, the students in this study who received the most analytical political instruction, Mr. Leander's AP class, were the ones who probably needed it the least. One of the negative ramifications of a neoliberal approach to education is that students become tracked, not just in terms of the types of classes that they take, but also in the type of content they are believed to be able to comprehend. In the case of political instruction, educators must realize that students of all academic abilities have political inclinations and can develop a sustained interest in politics if given the chance. If detailed study of politics is confined to honors and AP students, then educators are only helping widen the democracy divide.

Educational theorists are increasingly using Foucault's social theories to explain inequity and social reproduction, and this study offers a glimpse of both the benefits and shortcomings of using this perspective. On one hand, comparing the instruction at these three schools using a governmentality framework highlighted the neoliberal undertones that seemed to be dictating the quality of political instruction that occurred in these classes, which allows for a more critical analysis of pedagogy within a context of social reproduction and economic inequality. However, one limitation of viewing education purely through a Foucauldian lens is that it

offers few suggestions on how to improve the quality of instruction within the existing power structure. Too often, educational theorists are content to use Foucault as an explanation of social power rather than as a starting point for reform.

Perhaps the greatest lesson educators can take from this study is that governmentality exists, and part of its effectiveness is that those who participate within the system have difficulty recognizing ways in which power and authority are being articulated. Once this framework is recognized, educators can take steps to minimize its impact, often by simply changing perspective. For example, certain topics, such as political propaganda and media analysis, are universal within high school government classes. Instead of using hypothetical definitions to describe these ideas, all teachers can make their instruction more authentic by including contemporary examples of political propaganda found on television and the Internet, which, in turn, will hopefully lead into conversations about current political events and deeper political analysis (Journell 2009b). The same strategy could be used for any of the other seemingly abstract political concepts that are covered in a typical high school government class.

Yet these strategies can only be effective if educators are willing to recognize that all students should be exposed to a wealth of information, not just that which is deemed appropriate based on demographics. Part of combating social reproduction is recognizing the actions that are serving to continually oppress certain groups, even if those actions are made with the best of intentions, as seemed to be the case in this study. Only then can education begin to achieve the promise of narrowing the democracy divide in the United States.

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Notes:

1. Pseudonyms have been used for all schools and participants to help protect their identities.
2. The three schools are located in different districts and, at the time of the study, used different labels for their social studies courses. Roosevelt did not offer a course in US government but required all freshmen to take a course in civics. The other two schools, Armstrong and St. Thomas, required all students to take courses in US government, which was typically taken in students' senior year. At all three schools, civics or government was juxtaposed with a semester of economics. Although there may be nuanced philosophical differences between civics and government courses, each of these courses represented the primary focus on the American political system within each school's social studies curriculum, which is why I am using them for analysis. For aesthetic purposes, I use the term *government courses* to refer to both the civics courses at Roosevelt and the US government courses at Armstrong and St. Thomas throughout the remainder of this article.
3. Copies of the teacher and student interview protocols and student surveys can be requested by e-mailing the author.
4. A detailed description of this use of the survey precludes the scope of this article. For more information about the political climate of each school, as well as the procedures for distributing the survey to seniors and freshmen in each building, refer to Journell (2009a) or Journell (2010a).
5. As one might expect, the demographics of the 2008 presidential candidates provided a certain level of excitement and intrigue toward the election for students. This element of the election was not lost on the teachers in this study; however, none of the teachers truly deconstructed the role of race and gender in society in their coverage of the election. In other words, there is little evidence to suggest that the historical candidacies of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Sarah Palin fundamentally changed the ways in which the teachers in this study taught the election in their classes. Greater detail on this aspect of the study can be found in Journell (2009a).
6. One could easily make the argument that the students' knowledge of the election was not significantly different than that of the majority of the general population. Research within political science has

generally shown that the emergence of televised and electronic media has allowed disengaged citizens to easily ignore policy issues during elections or focus on issues of style and character over substance (Glass 1985; Keeter 1987; Prior, 2005). Rather than making judgments on the students' political knowledge, I am using this information to illustrate the differences in political awareness among students in the various classes and schools.

7. T. Roosevelt required all students complete 40 hours of documented community service before graduation.

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