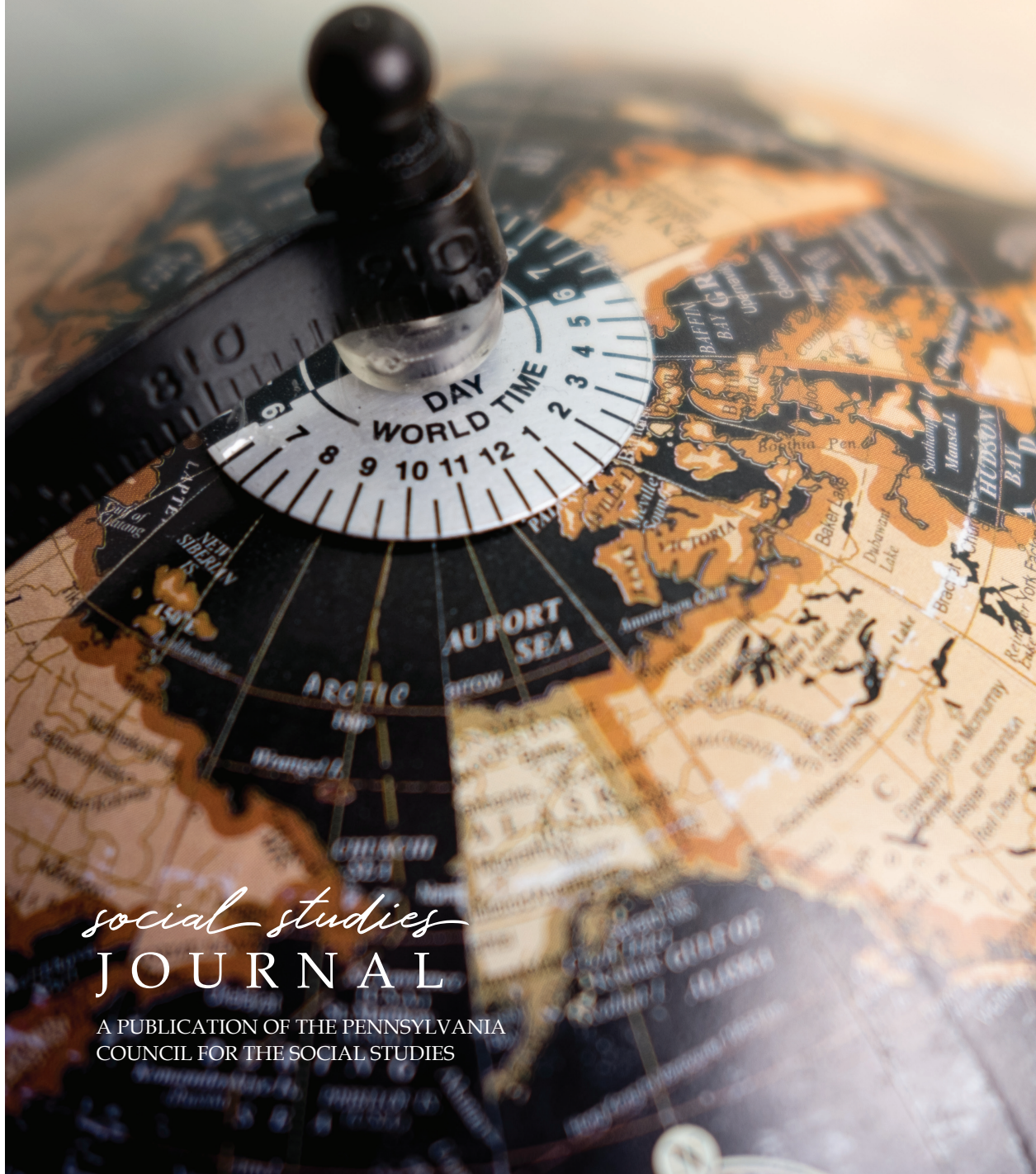

FALL 2017 | VOLUME 37 | ISSUE 2



social studies
JOURNAL

A PUBLICATION OF THE PENNSYLVANIA
COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES

“I STOOD THERE WONDERING IF”: TEACHING THE COMPLEXITY OF PATRIOTISM IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

Mark T. Kissling
The Pennsylvania State University

In my first semester of graduate school at Michigan State University (MSU), a professor assigned me to investigate the history of a school-related artifact of my choosing. Interested in both folk music and the teaching of patriotism, I chose to study “This Land Is Your Land” in U.S. schools. I knew the song was penned by Woody Guthrie in 1940, near Times Square, as a frustrated response to Irving Berlin’s “God Bless America” (see Santelli, 2012), but I also knew that I didn’t learn any of that context around the song when I first sang it in elementary school music class. As my hunch was that most Americans were familiar with the song, I wondered if it was due to a non-descript schooling experience similar to mine.

My project—which continues today, ten years later—has yielded fascinating results. Surely not all public schools currently teach the song, but many do, and almost certainly the majority of them have over the past five decades (Kissling, 2013). The primary reason for this is that since 1959, the song has been printed in numerous music textbooks. Once students began learning it in music class, it quickly became commonplace at school gatherings and performances of patriotic plays. For example, on the morning of March 13, 1975, students in schools across the United States sang “This Land Is Your Land” as the opening activity and theme song for the first annual national “Music In Our Schools Day” celebration. The

song was picked for its wide popularity and its patriotic overtones that fit with the country’s upcoming bicentennial the next year.

But the text of the song that was distributed to schools for Music In Our Schools Day—like so many music textbooks from 1959 to the present—only included four stanzas, what I call the “traditional” verses:

*This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York Island,
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf Stream
waters,
This land was made for you and me.*

*As I went walking that ribbon of highway
And saw above me that endless skyway,
And saw below me the Golden Valley, I said:
This land was made for you and me.*

*I roamed and rambled, and followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts,
And all around me, a voice was sounding:
This land was made for you and me.*

*When the sun come shining, then I was strolling
In wheat fields waving, and dust clouds rolling;
The voice was chanting as the fog was lifting:
This land was made for you and me.*

Guthrie’s two other original stanzas were omitted:

*Was a big high wall there that tried to stop me
A sign was painted said: Private Property
But on the back side it didn’t say nothing
This land was made for you and me.*

*One bright sunny morning in the shadow of the
steeple
By the relief office I saw my people*

*As they stood hungry, I stood there wondering if
This land was made for you and me.*¹

These “nontraditional” verses are noticeably different from the traditional ones. They engage topics such as private property and a relief office, and the last one questions *if* this land was made for you and me. So as a part of my graduate school project, I began to wonder why students in 1959 and 1975 and the late 1980s (when I was in elementary school) weren’t privy to all of these verses. And, I was curious why and how current teachers teach the song: was there still no “wondering if,” and if so, why?

The semester after I started my project, through MSU and personal contacts (I grew up in Mid-Michigan), I found four public elementary school teachers (from four different schools within ten miles of each other but in three different school districts) that taught “This Land Is Your Land”: one in Lansing, Michigan’s capital city; one in East Lansing, where MSU is located; and two in Okemos, the relatively affluent suburb where I grew up. Beth, Gail, Janet, and Samantha (pseudonyms) were White females who had been teaching for 10-30 years. Beth, Janet, and Samantha were music teachers across multiple elementary grade levels, while Gail was the general curriculum teacher for a K-1 classroom. Each of the teachers generously agreed to one interview in her classroom with me about why and how she teaches “This Land Is Your Land.”² The purpose of this article is to share

¹ Guthrie wrote different versions of the song (Santelli, 2012). Here I share his typed original version with handwritten edits, which I first saw in Pete Seeger’s book *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* (1997).

² I also traded a few emails with each teacher prior to our interview.

what I learned and consider its implications for elementary social studies teaching. I begin with a brief discussion of two relevant concepts—America/n and patriotism—and then examine why and how the teachers teach the song. Throughout I raise questions for teachers and teacher educators to consider, and I conclude with a charge to trouble traditional teaching of “This Land Is Your Land.”

Framing this Inquiry

Upon returning to the United States after years living in France, James Baldwin wrote, “No one in the world seems to know what [America] describes, not even we motley millions who call ourselves Americans” (1961, p. 17). Following Baldwin, I wonder how people—especially students—make sense of (or “construct”) what America is and what it means to be American. Through what Eisner (1985) calls the explicit, implicit, and null curricula, schools play a big role in this construction since U.S. teachers teach students daily about American government, history, literature, popular culture, etc.³ Additionally, many students pledge allegiance daily as U.S. flags are common sights in and out of schools. Indeed, throughout the country’s history, U.S. schools have

³ Paraphrasing Eisner, the explicit curriculum is what is *intended* (by teachers, standards, textbooks, and so forth) for students to learn. The implicit curriculum is what students learn *unintentionally* while the explicit curriculum is enacted. The null curriculum is what students learn from what is omitted in the explicit curriculum. The implicit and null curricula, taken together, are sometimes referred to as the hidden curriculum.

focused on teaching “America/n,” often through the lens of patriotism (Bohan, 2005; Koch, 1996; O’Leary, 1999; Westheimer, 2007a).⁴

One way that students learn about patriotism in the earliest grades is through music. “This Land Is Your Land” is one of many songs that typically resides in the mainstream elementary school curriculum. It is my contention, however, that students learn more than just the names, tunes, and lyrics of these songs. Woven into the learning of them is an unstated curriculum that is powerfully, and often implicitly, educative about America/n.

Patriotism—as both concept and action—is complex (e.g., Bodnar, 1996). A common contemporary definition of patriotism is “love for and loyalty to one’s country.” This definition, though, raises different ideas for different people. If an American denounced the U.S. Congress when it declared war on Iraq in 2003, was she exhibiting love for and loyalty to her country? Without even parsing out what “love for” and “loyalty to” mean, there are distinct ways of reading this action. It might be argued

that she was unpatriotic by challenging the decisions of those elected to lead her. It might also be argued that she was patriotic by exercising her First Amendment right to free speech.

Westheimer (2007b) offers two patriotism “umbrellas” (pp. 173-8). Authoritarian patriotism features the belief that one’s country is inherently better than other countries and, as a result, its citizens should support and follow, without questioning, the policies of the officials who run the country. The other umbrella, democratic patriotism, is marked by allegiance to a set of principles (e.g., freedom and justice for all) with an understanding that these principles are not necessarily always enacted by the government or its people. Both authoritarian patriotism and democratic patriotism can be said to express love for and loyalty to country, but the ways in which these expressions are enacted (as well as taught and learned) are quite different. While it is likely that no teacher easily fits into teaching for only one of these broad categories, this framework is helpful to think about how different teaching rationales might position students to engage what it means for themselves and others to be patriotic.

Why Beth, Gail, Janet, and Samantha Teach “This Land Is Your Land”

Without being collaborators, there were strong similarities in the teachers’ purposes for teaching “This Land Is Your Land.” The most straightforward purpose was that their students simply loved the song and the process of learning it. Prior to interviewing Beth in her classroom, she had her students perform (i.e., sing and hand-motion) the song for me. Although

⁴ “America/n” is an abbreviation of America and American. As Walzer (2004) notes, the noun “American” can refer to Canadians, Mexicans, and others who live in the Western Hemisphere, yet “American” has become a stand-in for *citizen of the United States of America* and as an adjective, a stand-in for *relating to the United States of America*. These are vast terms with a host of contested meanings and yet the terms are common to everyday, mainstream discourse in the United States. In this article, I typically comply with this common usage of “American,” as well as the use of “America” as an abbreviation for *The United States of America*. In reference to the United States, I use the words country, nation, state, and America. There is overlap across all of these words, which is why I use them, for the most part, interchangeably. However, I am cognizant that contested meanings are attached to each of these, especially when they are used in relation to each other.

her students had learned it five months prior, they, without recent rehearsal, easily and excitedly performed all four traditional verses of the song. This demonstrated both the students' enjoyment attached to learning the song and their ability to remember it, which I speculate is tied to the ease with which they learned it.

It is interesting to consider the importance of student enjoyment. While teachers generally want their students to enjoy learning, enjoyment does not automatically correspond to quality learning. There can be an ominous hidden curriculum that accompanies the explicit curriculum. I think back to my first year of teaching when I simulated trench warfare from World War I for my students. We played, essentially, a big game of dodgeball. My students loved the game, and this love directly contradicted my attempt to have students see the futility of war. It's not that fun should be stripped from learning, but the curriculum of "learning while having fun" can obscure some lessons taught to students. It is very possible that a student could learn explicitly that "This Land Is Your Land" is a fun song but learn implicitly that America/n is free from struggle and beyond critique. To what degree, I wonder, might the fun of "This Land Is Your Land" serve to palliate intended and unintended patriotic messaging?

A second purpose is that the teachers enjoyed the song as much as the students. All four teachers remembered learning the song when they were in their youth, with Beth and Gail definitively noting that they learned it in school. They had positive memories attached to this learning and so, in their teaching of the

song, they transmit something that they value and enjoy to their students. In this transmission, which indicates that it is customary to learn the song as a child in the United States, the teachers are implicitly teaming with teachers across the country, past and present, to carry on a decades-long American tradition. But tradition, by nature, is often self-reifying. In upholding this tradition, are the teachers able to critique the well-cut grooves of what it has meant to teach and learn the song in elementary school?

The third reason is that the teachers use the song to teach academic content. Gail, the lone grade-level teacher, uses the song to teach geography as her students plot the song's geographic references on a giant U.S. map. More important than teaching geography, though, Gail pointedly stated that patriotism was "the main reason" she teaches the song. This, she said, was due to a state social studies standard requiring her to teach patriotism to her K-1 students. While she noted that the concept of patriotism is hard for them to grasp at their young age, she indicated that they learn elements of patriotism "like recognizing the flag and being able to sing patriotic songs."

Importantly, patriotism here goes undefined as its meaning is left for students to cull implicitly. The emphasis is on rote action, not inquiry. Clearly, Gail's students are some of the youngest in the U.S. public schooling spectrum and a deep, complex understanding of patriotism at their age might be hard to imagine. But, even at their age, should student understanding of patriotism refrain from complicating the goals of obedience and unquestioned loyalty to the country? Fixing right and wrong, with the country always in the right,

positions students in such a way that any future instance of their country in the wrong must somehow be reconciled. When the complexity of patriotism dwells in the null curriculum—i.e., learning from what is absent—the default approach for reconciliation becomes one of disbelief or suppression.

The music teachers echoed Gail's patriotic reasoning for teaching the song. In fact, all four teachers indicated that they feel the song is something that all U.S. citizens need to know. Beth and Samantha said the song is for the students' "memory banks," and Janet offered:

If you're going to an American public school and growing up in this culture, it seems appropriate to teach some of those core, known-by-everybody songs that we all share...You want children to have that background knowledge so they can relate to what's going on. It just seems like, part of being an educated American citizen, you should have exposure to that.

Janet's quote implies that these "core" songs that are "known-by-everybody" are known by everybody *in the same way*. That, in essence, there is one meaning to "This Land Is Your Land." This implication, however, skirts the possibility that there are multiple ways of knowing the song. When knowing becomes fixed, there is little room for critical thought. Beth also teaches the song as a "core" patriotic song:

It's important to me because [the group of my students is] a diverse population. Even if it weren't, the U.S. is a diverse place and there are times when I'll have a parent of a foreign student or Jehovah's Witness say they won't sing a patriotic song. We're in a public school, and you're welcome to be here, but we're in a

public school and I do teach patriotism. Period. On the surface, there is nothing that is challengeable: this land is made for you and me. There is nothing real prickly. A couple of times a child from another country has asked why do we sing these [patriotic songs]? I say that these songs are about our country. We sing songs about other countries too. But we're an American school and this is what you get in an American school.

While Beth seemingly has a goal to foster one fixed understanding of the song without stirring controversy, I question what message this teaches a diverse (or, as Beth notes, even non-diverse) population of students. "This is what you get in an American school" might be an authoritative announcement that patriotism is not open for deliberation or critique.

At the same time, however, Beth stressed that she wants her students to understand "that this land is made for you and me" in addition to knowing that the song is part of the nation's heritage. Mindful of the diversity of her students (in terms of race, place of birth, and socioeconomic status), Beth considered the song's egalitarian message to be one of the driving forces behind her teaching of it. This mindfulness, however, does not square easily with the notion of teaching something akin to authoritarian patriotism. On the one hand, there is a message that trumpets equality and diversity, but on the other hand, there is a message of "Americanization," seeking to bring about a convergence of student understandings.

When I asked Beth why she feels the song is patriotic, she replied:

The concept of the bottom line. This land is made for you and me. It needs to be said because it is not always so. The

reality is that it may not feel like that to a whole lot of people. I think it's important to get that message into these kids, the kid with all the opportunity and the kid who lives in the trailer park. They may never have a shot at the American Dream, but I want it absolutely drilled in their heads that this place should be for you.

Beth is quite mindful to teach her students that what they feel might not be the same for everyone. While this pedagogical goal attempts to broaden student understanding of the diversity of the views of others around them, raising awareness about injustice, it does not necessarily spur students to question the injustice. Students are taught about injustice that they likely already know, either consciously or subconsciously, but they might not be prompted to consider why this is the case or consider what they and others might do to make the situation more equitable. In such a case, the explicit curriculum and the implicit curriculum clash: How can a student learn to appreciate and work for diversity while being asked to conform to a uniform love of country?

Interestingly, after Beth spoke the block-quote above, she added, "I teach [the song] as patriotic because it's in the patriotic section of the book, but [patriotism] is what it's about." She had laid out opposing arguments for teaching the song, ranging from Americanization to appreciation of diversity, but she also noted the importance of the textbook. Yet, while "This Land Is Your Land" is a common text in music textbooks, it is not a universal, stated curriculum requirement. Only Samantha had curricular documents that named the song, and in these, which were district-wide, the song was listed as a suggestion for fulfilling a standard entitled

"Curriculum Connection." It is significant that the song was not a big chunk of the scripted curriculum yet it was a sizable part of the enacted curriculum; perhaps it is too immersed in what is familiar and traditional to receive much critical consideration.

How Beth, Gail, Janet, and Samantha Teach "This Land Is Your Land"

One method enacted by all four teachers is called "echo singing," which means that the teacher sings the lines and the students sing them back in order for students to learn both the lyrics and melody. While echo singing allows for students to quickly learn the song, it seemingly parallels the "fixing" of patriotism described above. Certainly students need to sing similarly in order to sing together, but this replicates the teacher's version of the song. Unless the teacher also teaches other versions of the song, which none indicated happens, the song is closed off to variation.⁵ From this perspective, echo singing is mimicry and regurgitation. How the teacher views, constructs, and presents the content is merely transferred to the students. There is seemingly no room for student construction of knowledge and critique. The teachers described other general methods⁶, but I discerned three large trends for how "This Land Is Your Land" is taught across the teachers: in a patriotic unit at the start of the school year; through "talking" about the song; and, using the traditional verses.

⁵ A quick YouTube search will offer a number of versions of the song, but also see Santelli (2012).

⁶ Another method, utilized by three of the teachers and endorsed by the fourth, is teaching physical actions that correspond to the lyrics and are to be motioned while singing the song.

The patriotic unit. All four teachers teach the song in the context of a patriotic unit at the beginning of the academic year. As Gail explained, "Patriotism is a great spot to start [the school year] because you can talk about school spirit and classroom building," and Beth said that "This Land Is Your Land" is one of the songs she uses to set the tone for the year because it excites the students. In this context, the song can be a kind of tool, operated on multiple levels. At the most abstract level, it is a national patriotic tool, building student love for one's country. At a more concrete level, it is a school-based patriotic tool, building love for and within one's school. On both levels, the teaching of the song serves to lay out directives for what it means to be a citizen, of the country and of the school/classroom. This multi-level "mechanism of training" (Foucault 1977/1995), combined with student excitement while learning the song, establishes a host of pedagogical intentions for the school year (and, more largely, the process of schooling). But, are there aspects of democratic patriotism in this likely rigid, authority-imposing practice? For example, would there be any room for students (and citizens) to construct or challenge presuppositions about appropriate behavior or are the school's (and country's) rules simply pre-made and in need of following?

Gail and Samantha also noted that they teach the song at the beginning of the year to allow time to prepare students for community performances. Every year, Gail's students perform a patriotic holiday program for parents, nursing home residents, and other community members that includes singing of the "Pledge of Allegiance," "You're a Grand

Old Flag," and "This Land Is Your Land."

Thus, "This Land Is Your Land" is clearly much more than content to be learned; it is content to be performed publicly. In a sense, this performance by Gail's students is an initiation into what it means to be an American: to go out and perform the song for community elders who already know the song, probably learned it in school, and possibly had a similar rite of passage in their youth.

There was, however, some consideration of how "This Land Is Your Land" differs from other patriotic-unit songs. Gail said that learning the "Pledge of Allegiance" is about "respect [for America]," whereas learning "This Land Is Your Land" is about "friendship, fairness, and getting along." Her point was that "This Land Is Your Land" does not draw a direct connection between people and their government; rather, it highlights the relationships between people and the majesty of the landscape that they inhabit. Janet said, "There are other patriotic songs that I teach more for the pure patriotism," offering "The Star-Spangled Banner" as an example. This distinction among the songs is an important one because it highlights, even if implicitly, the possibility of different forms of patriotism by raising various ways in which one might be patriotic. Among this spectrum of patriotic songs, "This Land Is Your Land" is positioned on the margin of what might be called the "national." It is still considered patriotic, but patriotic is defined more in terms of community, social interaction, and land than loyalty to country.

Ultimately, for the music teachers, the textbook is the driving force behind the patriotic unit context, and with the music textbooks positioning "This Land

Is Your Land” as an American, patriotic song, what is learned from the books is clearly not just music-related.⁷ There is little in these textbooks, though, that challenges unquestioning celebration of America. The only resistance to this celebratory narrative that I could discern, in fact, came in Beth and Janet’s 2nd grade textbook teachers edition, which informed that Woody Guthrie “wrote ‘This Land Is Your Land’ to protest Californians’ mistreatment of ‘Okies’...He wanted to remind Americans of their commonalities and encourage them to share the vast wealth of the country” (*Share the Music*, 1998, p.254). And yet, this is a story of tidy progress with no attention given to why there were hard times in the first place.

“Talking” about the song. A second trend in how the teachers teach “This Land Is Your Land” involves informal classroom discussions, what all four teachers referred to as “talking.” Talking, in this sense, is a summative term, a catchall for what happens in the teaching moments outside of explicitly learning and performing the song. The content of these discussions is not necessarily planned out in detail and it seems to couch much of the students’ learning. Beth commented, “We talk about the U.S., about the goal of it being welcoming to all, and the importance of

⁷ Beth and Janet use the same 2nd grade textbook, which is a part of the *Share the Music* (1998) series of elementary music textbooks used for each of the grades that they teach. The book places “This Land Is Your Land” after “My Country ‘Tis Of Thee” in the chapter “Celebrations: Patriotic Days.” The 3rd grade textbook groups “This Land Is Your Land” with “America The Beautiful,” “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” and “You’re a Grand Old Flag,” categorizing these songs under the headings “From Sea To Shining Sea” and, like the 2nd grade book, “Celebrations: Patriotic Days.” Samantha uses a different textbook series but it also lumps “This Land Is Your Land” with similar songs.

patriotism.” Samantha noted, “We talk about patriotic not just being the history but also the songs that tell what the heart of America is.”

In both of these quotes, the teachers used the pronoun “we.” However, I wonder to what degree “we” is a stand-in for the teacher’s “I.” None of the teachers spoke to practices that asked students to share their ideas and experiences. The topics of this talking were not framed by the teachers as opportunities for the class to construct knowledge; rather, talking seemingly allowed the teachers to impart their knowledge to the students. While it is possible that the teachers simply did not speak to their practices that seek to have students construct knowledge, this idea of knowledge transference from teacher to student parallels echo singing and “fixing” the song.

Despite considerable talking, Guthrie, as the song’s composer, receives scant attention, and the historical context when the song was written gets even less. None of the teachers plays a recording of Guthrie’s version of “This Land Is Your Land” for her students.⁸ Gail does not mention Guthrie, nor does she pick up the topic of the United States circa 1940, but she did note that she could teach about Guthrie similar to how she teaches her students about authors of the books they read. She felt that teaching about the historical context would be much more difficult due to her students’ ages. Beth said that she does not teach directly about Guthrie but she and her students look at

⁸ Of the teachers, only Samantha plays no recordings of the song, choosing to simply play the piano for her students or sing a cappella. Gail plays a version by Lee Greenwood while Beth and Janet play a version that comes with the music textbook series, which is sung by a children’s choir.

the picture of Guthrie that is in the textbook. She indicated that she asks her students questions about Guthrie's appearance but they do not spend time, for example, considering *why* he might be wearing the clothes that he is wearing (instead of simply noting the clothes). Like Gail, Beth does not teach about the historical context of the song, which raises important questions about the null curriculum of teaching the song since a "history-less" understanding of the song implicitly serves to fix it as natural, unquestionable, and seemingly unconstructed.

Janet does not teach about the historical context of the song either but she did indicate that she talks with her students about Guthrie. Before our interview she emailed me, "We discuss when he lived...and that he was a composer and a folk singer who traveled all over the U.S. and wrote more than a thousand songs." She also highlighted that "his songs helped people lift their spirits in times of hardship." Interestingly, these quotes from Janet, which she wrote via email to me before our interview, are taken word-for-word from the teachers edition of a textbook that she uses (although she did not quote them). While one reason for Janet's response could be that I interviewed her in February, months after she had taught "This Land Is Your Land," and she perhaps wanted to refresh her memory with the textbook, another reason might be that she simply relies heavily on the textbook to structure how she approaches teaching the song.

Samantha overlaps a bit with Janet as she "talk[s] about how [Guthrie] was a free spirit who traveled America." She is the only one of the teachers who gives

some historical context: "We talk about what it was like in the 1940s, no TV or video games, and that people were outside a lot more than they are now. We talk about how communities did more things together and how crime and drugs were not so prevalent in the small towns." This quote raises a number of questions. For example, whose historical context is this? Likewise, how does this context encapsulate the song? Furthermore, how do these talking points, particularly about "no TV or video games" and "how crime and drugs were not so prevalent," frame students' understanding of America/n, past and present?

Using the traditional verses. All of the teachers teach the four traditional verses. As Samantha plainly noted, "I teach the verses that are in the [text]book." This sentiment is shared by Beth and Janet, and it parallels Gail's approach, which is to teach the verses that are sung by Lee Greenwood in the recording that she plays for her students. Gail explained that her "students do not seem to have trouble learning the lyrics." The music teachers agreed with Gail's sentiment while noting that some of the stanzas are easier to learn than others, with the first verse being the easiest. None of the teachers teaches the two nontraditional verses.

The fact that the textbooks or versions of the songs played for the students do not feature all of Guthrie's lyrics is not the lone reason for teaching solely the traditional verses. Gail was not familiar with the nontraditional verses prior to the study but the three music teachers were. For Samantha and Beth, there is concern about the topics and ideas expressed in the nontraditional

verses. Samantha feels that they are “controversial,” which influences her to not teach them. Beth commented, “I don’t even go into [the nontraditional verses] with the kids. Not at this level. Just a positive message.” Under this framing, there is an implication that the messages of the nontraditional verses (e.g., questioning private ownership of property and the sobering reality of hungry people; wondering “if this land was made for you and me”) are negative, or seemingly detrimental to the students. The positive message that Beth seeks, or the uncontroversial message that Samantha seeks, is one that removes all criticality and complexity about America/n and patriotism.

Janet was aware of the nontraditional verses because they are printed in a children’s book entitled “This Land Is Your Land” (Guthrie & Jakobsen, 2008), which she sometimes shares with her students while teaching the song.⁹ While recognizing that some of the nontraditional verses reference topics that are “different” than the traditional verses, she did not describe any difficulty with sharing them with her students. She did note, however, that engaging the nontraditional verses does alter the teaching of the song: “If you read through [Guthrie & Jakobsen’s book], it provokes a lot of conversation obviously. Then the whole idea of the hard times comes out... When you use the book it expands on the song.” The narrative introduced to

⁹ There is a large distinction here between teaching and sharing the nontraditional verses. None of the teachers, including Janet, teaches the nontraditional verses, which would entail having students learn and sing these verses.

students through the book, which features all six verses and vibrant corresponding pictures, presents more complex constructions of what America/n is and what it means to be patriotic. While Janet does not teach the song in this way every year, she does when she has “the time” or when “something more visual may be helpful” to her students’ learning.

Importantly, all of the teachers noted potential for teaching some or all of the nontraditional verses. Gail and Samantha indicated that teaching the “relief office verse” to their students given the bleak national and local economic climate during the last recession would be appropriate and possible. They also noted that older students could learn the nontraditional verses and find them meaningful. Beth felt that it would be possible for all of her students to learn the nontraditional verses if this learning took place in their general curriculum classes alongside of music class. Janet echoed this sentiment, highlighting that collaboration with the students’ grade-level teachers could open greater possibilities for her teaching.

While talking about the nontraditional verses, I asked Gail if teaching all of Guthrie’s verses would add to or contend with the goal of the patriotic unit in which she teaches “This Land Is Your Land.” Gail responded, “It wouldn’t be a contention... It would bring up things that are fair and things that are unfair, which leads to building of the country and the building of patriotism.” This possibility that would arise from teaching all the verses is not central, however, to why and how the teachers teach “This Land Is Your Land.” Therefore, the teachers are endorsing,

either explicitly or implicitly, Westheimer's (2007b) notion of authoritarian patriotism that does not ask critical questions about America/n and patriotism.

Troubling the Traditional Teaching of "This Land Is Your Land"

One reading of "This Land Is Your Land," with which I believe the teachers in this study would agree, is that the song's lyrics appreciate diversity and affirm unity. While the four teachers certainly aim to cultivate a sense of unity in teaching "This Land Is Your Land," this unity appears to be founded on a push for conformity, not embrace or even acceptance of difference. For example, issues of race and class were minimally considered in the rationales for teaching the song.¹⁰ Little was said by the teachers about exploring difference and understanding how difference operates. In fact, difference was flooded in a sea of patriotic commonality. While this objective was certainly not stated by the teachers, nor, I believe, consciously desired or intended, the inertia of tradition—with respect to curriculum, pedagogy, societal practice—virtually makes it inevitable. The song, which presumably trumpets diversity, can become a tool for inconsiderate conformity, which is akin to the notion under authoritarian patriotism that all Americans are alike in their explicit love for and loyalty to the country. Missing from this notion, though, is the idea that love and loyalty are enacted in many

¹⁰ Beth considered race and class directly but her method of addressing them centered on using "This Land Is Your Land" to look beyond, not think critically about, difference.

ways that are specific to the enactor (e.g., one might love America by protesting an instance of racial injustice).

Teaching conformity is understandable in that, for the teachers, "This Land Is Your Land" is a cultural text that their students need to know. In this sense, in order to be American, the students need to be able to recognize, understand, affirm, and sing "This Land Is Your Land" as symbolic of America. The teachers' references to the song as "core" content is reminiscent of Hirsch's (1987) advocacy for the learning of core knowledge that all students need to possess in order to communicate effectively with others and succeed in American society. Akin to Hirsch's argument, some of the teachers spoke about getting the song into the students' "memory banks," as if learning "This Land Is Your Land" is a deposit for future good living.

But, Hirsch's argument—specifically what it means *to know*—needs to be troubled. For the teachers in this study, what it means for their students to know "This Land Is Your Land" includes memorizing the lyrics to the four traditional verses, being able to sing these lyrics, and acknowledging that the song is patriotic alongside a handful of other songs. To know "This Land Is Your Land" is not to know that protest is woven through both its text and its history. This form of (un)knowing detaches the song from its composer and the context in which it was written and maps it on to a celebratory narrative about America that fails to recognize the complexity of America. Samantha upholds this narrative when she "talk[s] about what it was like in the 1940s" with her students: highlighting the absence of

television and video games then and the presence of crime and drugs now imagines an idealized American past.

The detaching of the song's creation context, while not necessarily purposely intended, has ramifications for how a student comes to know America/n. If students are introduced, for example, to the questioning at the end of the sixth stanza of the song—"I stood there wondering if this land was made for you and me"—ideas might be sown that America is a constant work in progress and a place for discussion and debate about, and action in response to, hardship. And, then, the song enhances (or at worst, signals) the idea that a patriotism of this construction is acceptable and, perhaps, desirable.

When the teachers speak of filling their students' "memory banks," I am reminded of Freire's "banking" concept of education (1993). This method approaches learning as gathering, as if knowledge that has previously existed outside of the students' lives must be directly deposited into the students' brains by the teachers. Learning, then, is entirely passive on the student's behalf. There is no struggle or critical thinking attached to "gaining" knowledge. Students are defenseless to the bombardment of American imagery that they see and internalize both in their textbooks and their classrooms (not to mention in their daily living outside of schools), and they are not taught to be critical consumers but malleable, non-filtering receptacles. What opposes the banking method is a form of pedagogy that positions students as constructors of knowledge. Questions, wonder, and discovery are present *and* central to the learning endeavor. From this perspective,

"This Land Is Your Land" can be a tool for complex thinking, not a deposit of blind patriotism.

Elsewhere (Kissling, 2015, 2016), I have made the argument that (social studies) teachers and students must explicitly wrestle with the complexity of patriotism—and that this wrestling, in and of itself, is an act of teaching and learning a kind of patriotism founded on critical thinking that is not authoritarian. This teaching and learning can be done in many ways, and at all age levels, including with "This Land Is Your Land" in the earliest grades.

Here are some suggestions for elementary teachers wanting to use the song in this capacity:

- Teach (and sing) all of Guthrie's original verses (Guthrie & Jakobsen, 2008).
- Teach about Guthrie, a complex and fascinating person (e.g., Kaufman, 2011), and the song's creation as a frustrated response to "God Bless America" (e.g., Santelli, 2012).
- Listen to different versions of Guthrie and others singing the song.
- Have students write their own lyrics based on their lived experiences as well as write responses to the song in other musical/lyrical forms.
- Have students wrestle with different constructions of patriotism and ask them to consider how, if at all, they feel "This Land Is Your Land" is patriotic.
- Expand this approach well beyond "This Land Is Your Land," to include any and all America/n and patriotic texts and topics (e.g., "Pledge of Allegiance," Thanksgiving).
- Collaborate with teachers across your school, including general curriculum teachers (i.e., grade-level) as well as special curriculum teachers (e.g., art, music, etc.).

Rethinking how “This Land Is Your Land” has been traditionally taught, teachers can position their students for lifelong consideration of their patriotism (and America/n) by teaching all six original verses and foregrounding Guthrie’s seismic “wondering if.”

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About the Author: Mark T. Kissling is an Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education at the Pennsylvania State University. He can be reached via email at: mtk16@psu.edu.