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Political or AP®olitical? AP Economics teachers, neoliberalism, and the political classroom

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An undergraduate thesis, advised by Professors Maya Nadkarni and Lisa Smulyan, submitted as a final draft on 30 April 2018 to the Departments of Sociology/Anthropology and Educational Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology/Anthropology & Educational Studies

ABSTRACT

"How does one speak objectively, if we're talking about someone's comments about sexually assaulting someone? How am I supposed to be like, 'oh, you know, you gotta understand, he's just saying that.' When somebody's not able to condemn white supremacy stuff, how am I supposed to be like 'well, you know, you're entitled to your opinion on that.' Or infowars stuff, where we got people that are denying that shooting massacres actually happened. Like ***how do I objectively deal with this if it's nonsense****?"*
Mr. Holton

In this qualitative study, I find that progressive public school teachers of AP Economics experience a multitude of institutional constraints that are direct descendants of the way that neoliberalism has mapped onto the teaching and structure of AP Economics. One particular constraint that I highlight is the internalization of the cultural narrative of the apolitical teacher. I examine, using semi-structured interviews, how these institutional and cultural constraints have manifested in the AP Economics classrooms of four mid-Atlantic public schools, and how the teachers leading those classrooms view their own agency to use their classrooms as sites for social change.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Motivations

I started to become more politically aware in my sophomore year of high school. The February 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin was a specific impetus for me to begin thinking critically about race, class, and police brutality. I became angry as I watched the media blame the victim for his own murder, and I started to feel politically isolated when it seemed that everyone at my high school was not angry and in fact, sided with George Zimmerman in the name of self-defense. Conversations happened more over Facebook than in-person, so tempers were uncensored and political views became inextricably attached to character. More than once, I unfriended people—both on social media and in real life. The polarization was intense, and I began to befriend a few students and one teacher who were similarly appalled at the presence of conservativism that seemed either willfully ignorant or actively vitriolic but was certainly not in any case a harmless matter of disagreeing opinions. We all ate lunch together in the teacher's classroom instead of in the cafeteria, chatting about politics and race and can you believe what this person said to me and I heard another teacher say that your friend only got into Columbia because he's black.

I came to know this teacher's political opinions very well, which was a new experience for me because I had been told by my Government teacher in ninth grade that teachers in my school district were not allowed to tell students any personal political information, including for whom they voted in elections. Getting to talk about politics

with this teacher felt, then, like an act of quiet resistance against the repressive school district policy of classroom depoliticization. That he was my AP Economics teacher made it feel even more rebellious, as he would lecture about the causes of poverty or the minimum wage, and I would see the conservativism in the argument of the theoretical neoclassical model and feel like no one else could pick up on them.

I was likely wrong, of course, as I was certainly not the only student who knew that our AP Economics teacher was politically progressive. He made little asides—jocular jabs at Republican policies and lines of logic. Besides, we all knew from his assertions that the models in neoclassical economic theory were grossly reductive, so no one took too seriously the claim that minimum wage always causes unemployment. However, I worried that too many students were in fact walking away with an oversimplified view of how the economy works such that during this important time of political awakening, students who were not as critically engaged were walking away taking Gregory Mankiw's[1] infamously conservative views as gospel.

This worry remained with me as most of the people in my class year went away to college. Our freshman year, Freddie Gray was murdered by the police in Baltimore, near

[1] Gregory Mankiw is a Professor of Economics at Harvard University. He has written one of the most popular textbooks for AP Economics and introductory undergraduate economics courses. His paper "Defending the One Percent" (2013) outlines many of his arguments surrounding political economy.

where I went to high school[2]. This was truly the moment that many of my acquaintances and I became alienated from each other. I must have unfriended hundreds of people—sometimes people that did not even comment, but who had liked a comment that I disagreed with profoundly. I could not tolerate that they considered it unacceptable for the protestors in Baltimore to break the window of a CVS, and that they equated that kind of violence with the kind of violence that Gray and his family experienced[3]. In their Facebook comments and posts, my former classmates revealed deep misunderstandings of the cycle of poverty and the inherited effects of slavery and segregation and seemed totally unaware of the economic privilege inherent in their whiteness, their parents' educational attainment, and living in the comfortable, affluent suburbs of Baltimore County rather than experiencing the deep poverty and governmental neglect of the heroin capital of the United States.

I was shocked at the extent of the political divide, and I wondered how much of their political education was intentional, and how much was imbued by their parents. Moreover, how much of it was learned or reinforced in the AP Economics classroom? How could we have taken the same course with the same curriculum and left with such different ideas of how the American economy works? This question remained in my mind

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[2] For more information, see Bever and Ohlheiser 2015.

[3] For a news article from the Baltimore Sun on the riots, as well as a quote from Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake that echoes the sentiments of many of my previous Facebook friends, see Dance 2015.

as I went through the Economics major in college and saw how political an economics class could be. The professors brought in case studies with academic and/or newspaper articles to supplement the theoretical model being covered and would set aside time to hold discussions where students could air concerns or defend frameworks and policies. I never felt as though I could not disagree with the professor, even if they had a clear point-of-view—I always got the impression that they were eager to be challenged from the few times I did see a student point out a seeming contradiction or limitation.

As I considered topics for my undergraduate senior thesis in Sociology/Anthropology and Educational Studies, I thought back to my AP Economics class and the diversity of student opinions it housed. I thought of my teacher, who may have been required to teach models and frameworks that he might not have agreed with. I realized that the intersection of my questions was hinting at the crux of scholarly questions about politicization of the classroom in the context of neoliberal structures and institutions.

Research Questions

I began this study wanting to explore how teachers deal with curricula with which they personally and politically disagree. Do they wrestle with the moral quandary of being forced to impart impressionable teenagers with models they perceive to be incorrect? Are there small ways that they sneak progressive politics into each lesson? I was interested in studying the teaching of AP Economics in particular because the material lends itself more easily to political teaching than, say, AP Calculus or AP Physics. In fact, it is often transparently political. In the Microeconomics portion, the course covers topics such as

government-funded provision of public goods, minimum wage and other labor-related topics, and environmental policy. In the Macroeconomics portion, the course discusses international trade policy (including tariffs and embargos), taxes and government transfers, and the actions of the Federal Reserve. In order to answer my original research questions, I asked teachers about their personal political views, about how politicized or neutral they find the AP-mandated curriculum to be, and about how they reconcile disagreements between what they teach and what they believe to be true or right.

As I sat with my data, I realized that teachers that I interviewed were not, as I had expected or maybe hoped, using their classrooms as sites of resistance against neoliberal policies. They taught the AP curriculum as it was given to them, some with occasional supplementary materials or discussions, but some with no extra materials at all. The majority of the teachers I interviewed are self-proclaimed liberals, and all of them strongly believe in progressive education, but they seemed to be following the nationally standardized curriculum for the most part, without experiencing much moral dissonance at all.

I realized that I had to revise my expectations and perhaps the questions that I could actually explore with the data I had. As I read through my transcripts, I realized that it was not that teachers were not attempting to teach apolitically because they did not care about the political development of their students. Rather, they felt so constrained by the structure of the AP course that they felt they could not teach supplementary political material without sacrificing valuable class time in which they might hope to, say, bring a student from a 2 (a failing score) to a 3 (a passing score). My

questions then became about how exactly it is that they feel constrained, and why. What are the consequences for a teacher with a low pass rate? What are the ways that they hope College Board could improve their AP program? In other words, *what are the mechanisms causing teachers to feel constrained by the structure of AP Economics*?

Moreover, sometimes teachers cited reasons other than constraints for intentional classroom depoliticization. They alluded to a cultural paradigm of teaching as apolitical. This common and pervasive narrative has led them to feel as though teaching apolitically is their responsibility and is the "right" thing to do. Recent teacher-activist movements have pushed back against this narrative in current teacher education, but it has already been deeply internalized in many teachers, especially those who were educated in traditional programs in the twentieth century. *What role does the narrative of the apolitical teacher play in influencing teachers in whether they view their pedagogy as political*?

I found that public school teachers of AP Economics experience a multitude of institutional constraints, most if not all of which are directly descended from the way that neoliberal ideology and policies have mapped onto the teaching and structure of the AP Economics course and exam. However, even progressive teachers do not necessarily want overtly political classrooms due to their internalization of the cultural narrative of the apolitical teacher. I examine in this thesis how these institutional constraints and this cultural narrative have manifested in the AP Economics classrooms of four mid-Atlantic public schools, and how the teachers leading those classrooms make sense of their environments and their own agency to use their classrooms as sites for social change.

Overview

In Chapter 1, I review the literature in order to frame my study within the conclusions of its predecessors, and as filling an existing gap in literature. In Chapter 2, I state the both the methodologies I planned to deploy and the ones that I ultimately used, as well as the reasoning behind each choice. The findings from data follow in Chapter 3. Finally, I conclude with reframing my data in the context of existing literature and offer my perspective on the possibilities for radical education for AP teachers working under constraining neoliberal policies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Neoliberalism in Public Schools

Neoliberalism is an ideology and set of policies that favors market outcomes over public sector goals and institutions. It has saturated every part of the American government, social system, and life, instilling profit as the priority above all else (Brown 2005, 38–39; Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin 2012, 5). Neoliberals value individual freedom and plan to achieve it through individual private property rights, free markets and free trade, and, often, governance through the educated elite rather than through majority rule or other means of democratic decision-making (Harvey 2005, 64–66). Unspoken are their goals to use public schools to turn the next generations of children into internationally competitive workers (Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin 2012, 7), to reinsert neoconservative ideology into schools (including notions of traditional content-based knowledge and curriculum, jingoistic patriotism, and school prayer) (Apple 2001, 47), and to renew the most favorable socioeconomic conditions for wealth accumulation by the economic upper-class (Harvey 2005, 19). However, as is usually the case, the practical outcomes differ from the theorized ideals. What neoliberal policies actually accomplish are increased income and race inequality, decreased local access to public goods and institutions, and cultural and economic control by corporations over definitions of democracy.

One of the main battlegrounds of the neoliberal war is in public schools, where much scholarship has been focused due to the immediate and obvious effects of reform.

Educational policies that privatize or shut down schools completely, hinge teacher employment on the test scores of their students, and push a nationally standardized curriculum are proxies for the general fight for market-based institutions in every aspect of society (Apple 2001; Brown 2005). No Child Left Behind (2001), one of the most studied pieces of legislation in recent years, was a huge federal education policy, the effects of which are still very much alive today (Lipman 2007). It was one of the first federal policies to fully embrace the neoliberal agenda by tying "impossible demands and no resources to punitive sanctions," (Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin 2012, 8) though Clinton and Gore also emphasized standards and standardized testing (Lipman 2007, 36). However, neoliberalism has been growing in the U.S. for much longer. In 1983, the Reagan administration published a report titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform* (Gardner). The report criticized low levels of student achievement and tied them to low teacher expectations and weak curricula, recommending standards-based accountability to solve what it called a "rising tide of mediocrity" in public schools. The report gained attention and prompted many into a state of panicked reform despite wide disapproval, both scholarly and otherwise, of its methods and recommendations (Au 2012, 73). Some criticized its misleading and ineffectual statistical methods (Koch 1984), the financial ability of states to actually meet its recommendations (Geske and Hoke 1985), the commission process and its tendency to jump to conclusions from inconclusive data (Peterson 1985), along with all the later criticism of the neoliberal education reforms that *A Nation at Risk* was a catalyst for (Berliner 1995; Peterson 2003).

On a more local level, neoliberal policies re-segregate the classroom by creating charter schools and voucher programs under the guise of free choice, undermining progress made since *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Hess and McAvoy 2014, 29). The high-stakes standardized tests of No Child Left Behind necessitate that teachers must teach to the test (especially in low-income districts and schools which depend on federal and state funding), which has been the subject of many qualitative ethnographies and essays by teachers who describe challenges in their own classrooms (Dover 2013; Gutowski 2012; Hagopian 2014; Krutka 2013; Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin 2012). High-stakes standardized tests generally refer to state-wide annual testing, which can take weeks out of the school year and which NCLB mandated schools must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on or else face consequences (Boehner 2002, 1482–86).

Standardized testing has roots in the eugenics movement in the early 1900s, which sought to scientifically measure and rank different populations based on a standard set of questions. The tests found white Europeans superior to all other races (Au 2015, 23–24) and ere used to justify racist and exclusionary policies. The push for standards, especially in the sciences, began as a part of the Cold War scramble to maintain a globally competitive edge (B. L. Schneider and Keesler 2007, 201), but has continued to this day. Even now, large-scale standardized tests still produce racial gaps in scores, even when controlling for variables like income, gender, and educational attainment (Gosa and Alexander 2007; Jencks and Phillips 1998). The subject of my study is related to this sort of testing but focuses more on the Advanced Placement (AP) tests given by the College Board every May. The AP program specifically was developed out of the research and

practices surrounding gifted education and tracking, which began in the mid-19th century (Lacy 2010, 20), and culminated with the mid-20th century in the founding of the College Board, the Educational Testing Service, and the Advanced Placement program. The creation of the AP program was also motivated by the Cold War, which provided a context for bringing talented students out of the woodwork and pushing them to assume roles in the sciences, diplomacy, and military technology. In the post-Civil Rights era, school reformers, increased government funding, student demand, and the College Board alike led a movement to expand access to AP courses far beyond the 1,229 students who took exams in the 1955-1956 school year (College Board 2017a; Klopfenstein 2004).

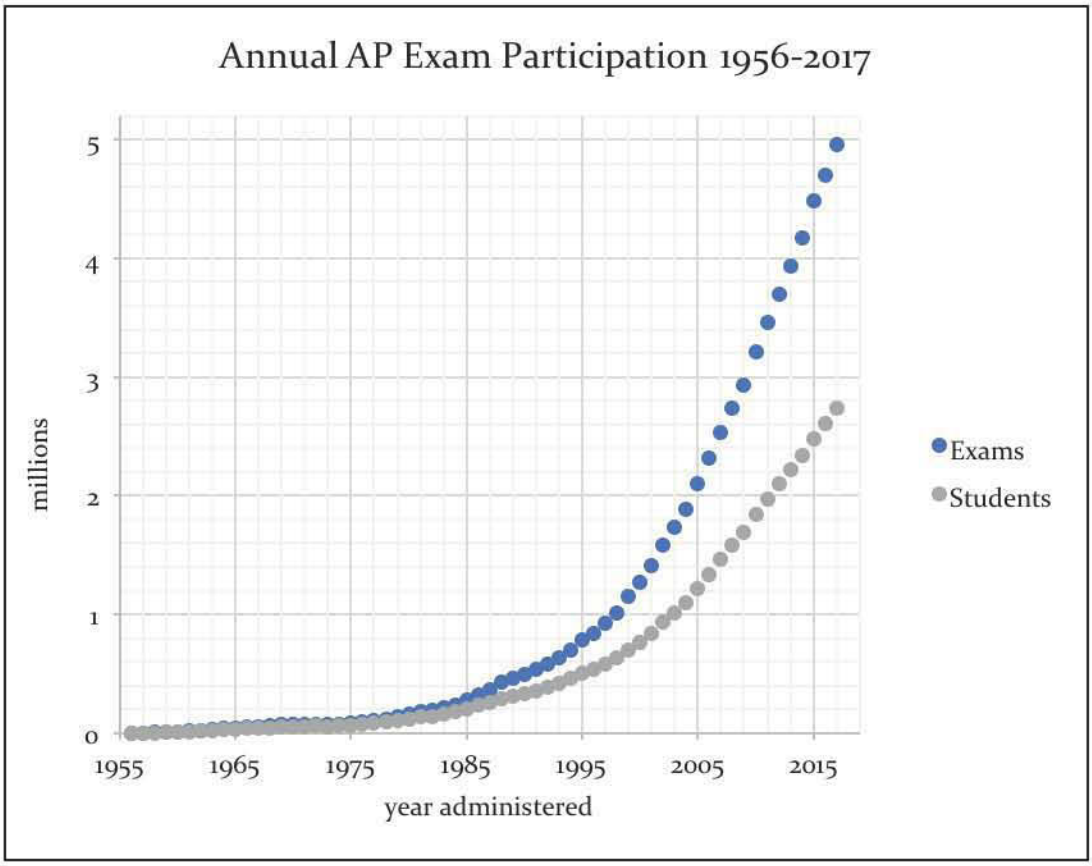

Figure 1. Annual AP Exam Participation 1956-2017

Not only were more schools offering more APs to more students, the College Board also developed entirely new courses. In the early 1970s, Music, Studio Art, and History of Art were added. In the late '70s and early '80s, Spanish and Computer Science followed, then both American Government and Comparative Government in the late 80s (Rothschild 1999, 187, 190, 193). In 1989, in the midst of this period of expansion, the AP Microeconomics and Macroeconomics courses and exams were added.

While the 1970s through mid-1990s could be considered a period of focus on equity and access, the next few decades saw a remarkable shift in College Board's agenda. Since the 1999 hiring of Gaston Caperton as the College Board president, scholars have noticed that AP has become more and more about maximizing revenue (Lacy 2010, 38–

39). College Board has sought to increase the number of participating schools and exams taken seemingly unendingly, has raised their prices per AP exam to $94 in 2017-2018 (College Board 2017b), and pays their CEOs handsomely—almost $700,000 in 2013 (College Board 2015). This has led many to criticize College Board for acting in the interest in profit rather than like a nonprofit with goals like increased access to high-quality education and college preparation (Lacy 2010, 40).

The recent expansion of AP has led some scholars to point out a criticism beyond just College Board's questionable nonprofit status: that AP's emphasis on access rather than on its original goal of high-standards, rigorous education for gifted children has caused an expansion beyond College Board's ability to ensure quality in every AP-labeled classroom. This overexpansion consequently delegitimizes the presence of AP on high school transcripts, which undermines the founding purpose of the AP program, and has led some elite high schools to abandon AP (Lichten 2000; J. Schneider 2009) in favor of independently developed and tested rigorous curricula (Gibbs 2017; Independent Curriculum Group 2018; A. Jackson 2017; Landsberg and Rathi 2005; Zhao 2002). The expansion falls in line with a main value of American public schools: that all children benefit from schooling, and that all children should receive equitable treatment. However, Lortie finds that teachers emphasize working individually with each student as if doing so was going above and beyond (Lortie 1975, 115). This indicates that in the neoliberal version of American schooling, the goal is actually not individualized attention, but rather large quantities of general improvement. The same value pluralism has manifested in the overexpansion of the AP program—even going so far as to promise in a

published initiative that every high school in New York City will offer APs, even though, as stated in the previous paragraph, NYC high schools that do offer APs see "wide disparities in participation and performance for black and Hispanic students, as well as English language learners and students with disabilities" (College Board 2018). While the College Board and New York City assert that they will rigorously train both new and continuing AP teachers, educational economists have found teacher training to have little measurable impact on student test scores (Harris and Sass 2011). Moreover, efforts during the expansion and access era were concentrated in certain schools and not others, thus reinforcing the existing disparities in achievement between low-income and high-income, rural and non-rural, and small and large high schools (Klopfenstein 2004).

School administrators, such as principals and superintendents, are sometimes the most direct agents in the expansion of AP, as in Florida where teacher bonus pay was based on pass rate, but superintendent bonus pay was based on increased participation (Rowland and Shircliffe 2016, 412). This reinforces a capitalist and gendered separation (Apple 1993, 265) between the (traditionally female) teachers as in-the-trenches, directly affecting change, and the (traditionally male) administrators as out-of-touch, enacting and enforcing test-oriented policies that constrain the teachers' ability to profoundly defy the conservative status quo. Rowland and Shircliffe found that AP-focused administrators name teacher gatekeeping as a barrier to AP participation, such that changing teachers' mindsets that only certain students belong in AP classes is the key to expanding AP access to low-income students and students of color (2016, 413). To administrators, teachers that cannot "successfully" teach diverse classrooms—i.e., attain a high pass

rate—are not "suitable to teach AP," thus explicitly equating teacher quality with their students' pass rate. This places undesired pressure on teachers to focus on improving their pass rates, much like they must do with other forms of high-stakes standardized testing, and which is often resisted against (Au 2012; Croft, Roberts, and Stenhouse 2016; Hagopian 2014; Picower 2011, 2015; Schniedewind and Sapon-Shevin 2012).

The expansion of AP was spurred along by the popularization of annual high school ranking systems such as the Washington Post's Challenge Index, which was first published in 1987, and the U.S. News list of Best High Schools, which followed in 2007. Higher spots in ranking systems are coveted by high schools trying to attract wealthier residents and higher-quality teachers, and it is necessary to evaluate their methodology in order to analyze their impact. What is it that ranking systems are measuring? The Challenge Index, developed and run by Jay Mathews, is the simpler of the two. It requires only two numbers, and only one calculation.

$$\text{Challenge Index} = \frac{\text{number of exams given}}{\text{number of students graduating}}$$

In words, the Challenge Index is the ratio of the number of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge International examinations given at a given high school to the number of students graduating from that high school. High schools are only included in the ranking if they have a Challenge Index of at least 1, which means that the school administers at least as many exams as they have graduating seniors. Mathews considers this a "modest standard," but notes that only 12% of the United States' 22,000 high schools meet the requirement (2017). The U.S. News ranking is more complicated,

with four steps and more data required. Schools had to pass step one to reach step two, step two to reach step three, and so on.

1. Are the school's students performing one-third of one standard deviation above the state average, factoring in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in the student body?
    a. The schools in the top 10% of their state automatically pass this step, and the schools in the bottom 10% automatically fail.
2. Are the school's disadvantaged students performing at or better than the state average for disadvantaged students?
3. Is the school achieving a graduation rate of 75% or better?
4. Is the school's College Readiness Index (CRI) at or above the median CRI of 20.91?
    a. The CRI is calculated with 25% weight on the AP participation rate (number of 12th-graders who had taken at least one AP exam divided by total number of 12th-graders) and 75% weight on the quality-adjusted AP participation rate (number of 12th-graders who passed at least one AP exam divided by total number of 12th-graders). (Morse 2017)

There are advantages and disadvantages to both, which helps to explain how they can coexist in such popularity. The U.S. News ranking requires much more data, which states are sometimes reluctant to provide (as in the case of North Dakota), or which is sometimes different in format across states (Morse 2017). They also use each state's standardized test data in steps one and two, which may be inconsistent due to each state having its own unique standardized tests, and which is generally understood to be a poor

proxy variable for student achievement, especially for low-income students and students of color (Castenell and Castenell 1988; Freedle 2006; Jencks and Phillips 1998). On the other hand, the Challenge Index does not factor in AP success rate at all, only AP participation, which may present a nefarious incentive for administrators to offer many APs and indiscriminately encourage students to take them, without ensuring quality via sufficient resources and support. Mathews justifies the decision to exclude pass rate as a factor by asserting that many high schools inflate their pass rates by only allowing previously high-achieving students to take AP, IB, and Cambridge courses and exams, and that exposure to rigorous curriculums helps in college for any type of student, even those who fail (2017). He cites a longitudinal quantitative U.S. Department of Education study that found academic intensity to be the strongest indicator of later success in college, surpassing class rank, GPA, and test scores (Adelman 1999).

Rankings, no matter their methodology, reinforce the neoliberal obsession with the free market by attempting to move closer to the perfectly competitive market's assumption of perfect information, thus allowing future parents and parents with school-aged children to make a better-informed choice about relocation into a school district or specific school zone (Henwood and Featherstone 2013). The common usage of ranking affects not only mobile families but also the schools themselves, and can be analyzed under the lens of reactivity or Foucauldian surveillance, taking changes in behavior as being due to institutional awareness of being observed (Rindova et al. 2017). This has has been found with ranking systems in the nonprofit sector (Szper 2013), law schools (Espeland and Sauder 2007), and corporate responsibility (Chatterji and Toffel 2007).

Anthropology has analyzed this type of behavior as being a part of a new, enhanced audit culture (Strathern 1996, 2000). Whereas previously, auditing referred to the measurement of student achievement, a new enhanced form of auditing in the education policy context focuses on the process that the institution of education puts students through on their way to the standardized test (Strathern 1996, 6). Enhanced audit culture has had major effects on the structures of institutions, and several of the effects that Shore and Wright (2015, 25–27) name can be applied to auditing in public education. Namely, audit culture creates an environment where teachers have in-classroom freedom as long as they fulfill certain numerical goals set by their administrators and districts, rankings and reputation matter greatly for the wellbeing of a school, professional development is reduced to checkboxes while neglecting the opportunity for actual improvement, and ease of conclusion matters more than completeness of description—by decontextualizing problems, audit measures "achieve their portability and their political effects" (Shore and Wright 2015, 27).

Neoliberalism, as a holistic system of values and policies, has found a warm home in the world of public education policy in the United States. On a micro-level, it has worked with neoconservatism to alter incentive structures and disempower students, teachers, and school communities in favor of private education corporations and wealthy political donors. On a macro-level, neoliberalism works to exacerbate the dominance of the white economic elite. Every head of the neoliberal hydra, to borrow Picower and Mayorga's metaphor (2015), is focused on maintenance or stratification of existing social inequalities via the implementation of privatized market structures in place of public

provision of goods and services. One head in particular is focused on public education as a battleground for control, and though it seems to regenerate each time social movements eke out any political progress, let us not merely victimize some of the most important actors in those social movements. Public K-12 teachers, at the heads of classrooms, sit at some of the most hotly debated seats in the policy world because of teachers' powerful ability to engage with and influence our nation's children.

The Political Classroom

Historically, schools have often been sites of social change (see *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, and Singer and Butler 1987), a label which continues to apply today. Banned books raise questions about the state's right to censorship and the citizen's right to intellectual freedom and access (Burress 1989; Foerstel 2002); issues with dress codes speak in dialogue with larger implications about victim-blaming, racial bias, and body shame (Pomerantz 2007; Lovell 2016; Aghasaleh 2018); the anti-gun movement gained an enormous amount of momentum following the activism of the Parkland survivors (Talbot 2018). In the ever more neoliberal world of education policy, there exists a battle for control of schools between policy makers, governments at every level, teachers, students, families, and community members. Teachers struggle for control over their own classrooms, fighting administrators and policymakers for space, resources, and curricular agency.

When teachers construct and maintain political classrooms, they are acting in direct resistance to a cultural narrative of teachers as apolitical. This pervasive narrative

ignores their role as value-transmitters, usually out of fear of indoctrination (Warnock 1975). This fear has actually not always been tied to education, and in fact was almost synonymous with it for many centuries while education was almost exclusively provided by religious organizations (Nordenbo 1978, 130). While public schools are now largely separate from the direct supervision of the church, corporate and state interests have entered the fray (Palmeri 1996, 5–8). In our currently pluralistic society, scholars such as Lawrence Stenhouse advocate for the teacher to act with "procedural neutrality," moderating classroom debates without taking any sides (1983). This narrative can discourage teachers from including politics in their curriculums, even in a course like AP Economics which lends itself quite naturally to political discussions. Though already deeply internalized within the institution of teacher education and the structures of the public school system, the concept of the apolitical teacher has indeed been challenged in radical education scholarship (Zinn 1994) and continues to garner attention within progressive education circles (Sapon-Shevin 2010).

One way that teachers construct political classrooms is by using their curriculum and pedagogy to lift the voices of the oppressed and marginalized, exercising sensitivity to students of different backgrounds and lifestyles, and in general ensuring that the dominant oppressive culture is critiqued as much as possible and reproduced as little as possible in one's classroom. The combination of these goals into a cohesive teaching philosophy are called different things: culturally responsive teaching (Villegas and Lucas 2002), critical multiculturalism (May and Sleeter 2010), or teaching for social justice (Picower 2011). Some consider teaching for social justice a form of resistance against the

constraining effects of neoliberal policies, which has been well-documented (Dover 2013, 94; Hagopian 2014; Picower 2011). This can look like including social justice content[4] within skill-based standards, or when that is not possible, including supplementary readings and materials. In more blatant cases, teachers openly teach against the mandated curriculum (Picower 2011, 1127) or boycott their state standardized tests (Madeloni 2014). Sometimes, though, even blatantly resistant teachers struggle—Madeloni, for example, cites grappling with the possibility of being fired while teaching students to "name the accountability system for what it was and to consider ways to resist" (2014:62). In each case, critical teachers find that their classroom is unavoidably political because of the way that neoliberal and neoconservative thought bleeds into the structure of the classroom. These are the teachers that scholars of the political classroom seek to understand.

Some studies on the political classroom investigate how teachers with political content use and moderate discussion, allowing for the centering of student voices. They ask, "How does a teacher's ability to teach discussion skills, prepare students for discussion, and facilitate the classroom discussion influence students' experiences and learning?" (Hess and McAvoy 2014, 45). Others are more focused on teacher motives, studying the relationship between teachers' educational aims and the "good judgments about the ethical questions that arise when they decide to create what we call the political

[4] By social justice content, I refer to that which engages the student in critical, equity-minded thinking and action on sociopolitical policies, institutions, and ideologies.

classroom" (Hess and McAvoy 2014, 73)[5]. Teachers have been found to struggle with applying their politically-based educational aims to unreceptive students with beliefs different than their own (Engebretson 2017, 5). Teachers must also realize that they are inadvertently and sometimes unavoidably part of a system at the classroom-, school-, and district-levels that imparts a particular "hidden curriculum" to students—what Jean Anyon, building off of Philip W. Jackson's original definition, defines as the unspoken elements of a student's education that prepare them for a certain social class of work (J. Anyon 1980; P. W. Jackson 1968). Other scholars have expanded the reach of the hidden curriculum to include all tacit messages in the classroom which help to reproduce the social order (Morris 2005; Nolan 2009; Y. Anyon et al. 2018). The hidden curriculum discourages critical thinking about one's place in society and about socially accepted norms. A study on the hidden curriculum of a classroom might ask, "To what extent are partisan and ideological messages about government and civic life conveyed by teachers and by classmates?" (Niemi and Niemi 2007, 36). Niemi and Niemi's study found that while teachers may intend to suppress their own political views in order to allow students the space to form and express their own opinions, they often express political views and take stances anyway (43). This suggests that perhaps being apolitical is not so easy as merely setting an intention, and that the hidden curriculum is more insidiously omnipresent than is immediately obvious.

[5] Hess and McAvoy define educational aims as the student outcomes that the teacher hopes to accomplish through a combination of curriculum and pedagogy.

The hidden curriculum manifests in the imparting of values as well as in content. Lortie has found that when teachers allude to goals such as moral and citizenship-related socialization, they tend to emphasize compliance and obedience. This helps to illuminate how even a well-intended goal such as helping a student to be a better person can actually be working to produce the next generation of "dependable citizenship," especially in a context where the definition of citizenship is inherited from social narratives rather than critically examined (1975, 113). A related phenomenon occurs when teachers delineate the boundary between political discussion and official learning time, thus implicitly separating politics (which students find interesting) from civics education (which students find boring) (Niemi and Niemi 2007, 46–47). While teachers sometimes act in this way inadvertently, they are also sometimes taking a stance about what belongs in the classroom and what they feel they have the authority to handle (Miller-Lane, Denton, and May 2006, 34). At other times, they are intentionally demarcating neutral space for their students to develop their own opinions (Miller-Lane, Denton, and May 2006, 36). Some educational psychologists agree that to develop civically engaged students, the school itself should encourage political discussion in a democratic climate (Lenzi et al. 2014, 252).

While studies exist on teaching methods in political classrooms exist, there has not been sufficient work done on how teachers come to view their classrooms as unavoidably political spaces or what the factors are that motivate some teachers but not others to intentionally teach for social justice.

Pedagogy of Economics

Economics is a politicized field, as indicated by the preponderance of economists in both policy-oriented organizations and the relative partisan split in the academic sphere. Career economists populate think tanks and government agencies, and academic economists often make policy recommendations, whether it be in the press[6] or in a testimony before Congress itself (Mankiw 2004). The way that academic economics is brought to the policy world is straightforward: economic models are applied using empirical data to imply optimal policies (Jelveh, Kogut, and Naidu 2015, 4). Disagreements about ideal policies often boil down to disagreements about the empirical estimates of certain crucial variables. For example, policy recommendations about minimum-wage are based on the relative elasticities of supply and demand curves, which are calculated from empirically collected wage and income data, in the model of the market for labor. If the calculated elasticity of the demand for labor is high relative to the calculated elasticity of the supply of labor, then a minimum wage would create more unemployment-based inefficiency than the increase in standard of living is worth. In the academic world, Cardiff and Klein found that the ratio of Democrat economists to Republican economists is more equal (2.8) than in most other social science fields, like sociologists for example which have a ratio of 44 Democrats to every Republican (2005). Fuchs, Kreuger, and Poterba found a strong correlation between academic labor and

[6] For an example, see Paul Krugman's popular New York Times Opinion column at https://www.nytimes.com/column/paul-krugman.

public economists' values and their policy positions, and that these economists are overconfident in their own estimations of parameters even in situations where estimates vary widely across the field (1998, 1415), which echoes the sort of partisanship found in the political sphere. Often, economists' political affiliations can be teased out from their published writings; for example, conservative economists publish significantly larger taxable income and labor supply elasticities which imply a small optimal income tax and a lower optimal minimum wage (Jelveh, Kogut, and Naidu 2015, 29).

The largest academic organization of economics, the American Economic Association (AEA) founded their Committee on Economic Education (CEE) in 1955 with the mission to "improve the quality of economics education at all levels: pre-college, college, adult, and general education" and publishes annual reports on that year's conferences and major papers (American Economic Association 2017). The 1987 Annual Report announces the imminent creation of the AP Economics program, developed over two years in a collaboration between the CEE and the Joint Council on Economic Education (JCEE) (Hansen 1987, 260). The CEE states that their reason for pushing for the creation of AP Economics is:

> To give more prominence to a subject whose teaching is now mandated in more than half the states, to enhance the quality of teaching in high school economics, and to encourage the development of curriculum materials and testing instruments that will improve the quality of the economics courses offered in the high schools (Hansen 1987, 260).

The following year's Annual Report offers an update on the progress of the AP Economics course's development: "Several pilot exams have been developed and pretested and are now being reviewed by economists. An AP instructional package is

being prepared for use by high school teachers in the AP courses," (Hansen 1988, 200) which offers evidence that the prominent academic economists were interested and invested in the creation process of the AP Economics course. Steven Buckles, the first Chair of the Economics Advanced Placement Task Force (from 1986 to 1991), along with John S. Morton also name a purpose of the development of AP Economics as the improvement of all high school economics courses. The prestige of teaching AP, they predict, will lead high school teachers to pursue higher education in economics. Since they are likely to be required to teach regular economics as well as AP, the effects of further education in economics from universities will spillover, improving the teaching of economics as a whole (1988:256–66). Furthermore, Buckles and Morton anticipate that AP Economics teachers will advocate for increased prestige within social sciences departments in high schools (266). Also implicit in Buckles' and Morton's report is that taking AP Economics will prompt more interest in majoring in economics in college (266), which helps economics departments that often compete for funding with other departments.

We can see, then, that the creation of the AP Economics program, as discussed in the introduction, was headed by committee members within the American Economic Association, membership of which includes many undergraduate economics professors. This connection between undergraduate and secondary school economics means that trends in undergraduate economics pedagogy and curricula often eventually find their way into the high school. Many undergraduate economics professors are critical of field-wide norms in pedagogy and offer suggestions developed in their own classrooms for how

to better engage students and impart both knowledge and the skill set required to think like an economist (Becker 1998, 2000; Becker, Becker, and Watts 2006; Karunaratne, Breyer, and Wood 2016; Vazquez and Chiang 2015). Other professors are concerned that economics needs a more activist focus (Green 2015; Stockhammer and Yilmaz 2015), pulling influence from other more explicitly political fields. These critical perspectives have not yet made their way into the mainstream as much as progressive education and its theories and practices as a whole have.

AP Economics enters a student's life, either by invitation or due to an expectation or mandate of some kind, around the time that students are becoming more politically aware and active. The applicability of the material to real life social issues lends the course easily to politicization. The way teachers of AP Economics choose a combination of College Board's suggested curriculum and their own curricular ideas sits at the intersection of the history of neoliberalism and how it has affected current educational policies and paradigms, the ways that teachers construct and hinder democratic political classrooms, and the development of pedagogy in the field of economics. As the AP program expands, bringing AP Micro- and Macroeconomics along with it, further research needs to be conducted at the intersection of these fields of study. My study attempts to bridge the gap between studies of other kinds of political classrooms with studies of economics pedagogy, all within a critique of neoliberalism and neoconservatism.

METHODOLOGY

This basic qualitative study uses interviews and content analysis (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 23–25) to ask how AP Economics teachers in public high schools view their roles in the politicized classroom within the context of neoliberalism in public education. I initially hypothesized that some progressive teachers find ways to covertly insert their own political views (as overt politicization of the classroom is generally frowned upon if not disallowed by school districts), but surmised that other teachers might attempt to keep their classroom explicitly neutral. While this hypothesis ended up largely untrue in each of the cases of my four participants, hypotheses in qualitative research are meant in any case to guide the gathering of data, and are derived from theoretical frameworks and prior research, rather than in quantitative research when hypotheses are to be tested as true or false (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 17). The interesting finding is not *if* teachers are political in the classroom, but *how*. Though my participants may not maintain social justice classrooms, the question then becomes *why not?* This type of question aligns with other qualitative studies that inquire as to "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 6).

The sociology of education, which this study draws methodology and theory from, has historically been split between macro- and micro-sociology. Generally, macrosociologies, which look for group outcomes and generalizable trends, tend to be large-scale quantitative studies while microsociologies, which focus on details within

small groups' or individual's lived experiences, tend to use qualitative methods (Boyask 2012, 23–24). My focus on interviews and attempt to explain individual experiences mean that my study fits into the qualitative microsociological camp.

The anthropology of education, as with much anthropology in general, tends to study the marginalized subsets of society. For example, in the early 20th century, anthropologists of education were given U.S. federal grants to study acculturation in the country's minority communities (Mills 2012, 35). My study, instead, focuses on the privileged—college-minded high school students in competitive school districts with access to Advanced Placement courses, teachers with the educational background to teach them, and the curricular ideas developed by experienced, tenured professors in Economics. In focusing on these populations, my study joins a growing number of sociological and anthropological studies of the elite while adding to the scope of the field, as most current studies focus only on colleges or preparatory boarding school (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009; Khan 2011, 2012; Soares 2007; Stevens 2007). These studies tend to employ ethnographic participant-observation, which was not possible under the scope of my study, and qualitative semi-structured interviews, which is my main form of data gathering.

Setting

This study takes place in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States of America, within four schools in two school districts in two different states. The schools' student bodies vary in socioeconomic status and AP exam pass rate, but each school currently offers AP Economics and has offered it for at least 5 years. The time period I am studying

is the present, but I also draw on the histories of the AP program, the College Board, and American education reform from the past century.

Interviews and Data Collection

My use of AP Economics as a lens in the context of neoliberal education policy allowed me to focus my search for participants to just teachers of AP Economics in public high schools. I first asked an AP Economics teacher that I knew, and when he agreed to participate, I asked him for any recommendations for other teachers he knew who might be interested. With this snowball method, two other participants were found in a suburban district in the mid-Atlantic. I then conducted semi-structured interviews with a teacher in the school district surrounding my college, which is also a suburban district in the mid-Atlantic. He was recruited with the help of Swarthmore College's Educational Studies department, which has developed relationships with local schools for ethnographic observations and student-teaching.

One of my main sources of data was the semi-structured interviews. This research method fit well because I knew the type of information I was looking for, but wanted to leave room to hear different interpretations of certain terms: "the political classroom," "neoliberal educational policy," and "progressive education," to name a few. I also wanted to make sure participants had the option to plunge deeper into topics they felt more passionately or had thought intentionally about. Previous studies on political pedagogy have also used semi-structured interviews of teachers with success, though these tend to be in the undergraduate context (Green 2015) or not specific to AP (Miller-Lane, Denton, and May 2006) or not about economics (Ryter 2013).

All four of my interviews took place between October and December 2017 and their lengths ranged from forty-five to ninety minutes. I was surprised at how easily I was able to find the four participants, but the snowball method in the first district and the wealthy suburban location of my college meant that most of my participants were homogenous in identity and were teaching in similar school districts. Interviews took place either at a public café or in the teacher's classroom. All interviews were audio-recorded with the explicit written permission of the participant and their contents were transcribed and coded.

Potential categories for coding were noted during the interview itself, and I also took notes on the participant's posture, facial expressions, and environment—essentially, anything that would not have been recorded in the audio file. These notes were also digitized and folded into the preexisting interview codes.

I analyzed curriculum materials obtained from interviewed teachers and the introductory economics textbooks that are assigned as mandatory reading or that are used for lecture slides. The two most common textbooks cited were Gregory Mankiw's (2014) and an adaptation of Paul Krugman and Robin Wells' college textbook for AP (Ray et al. 2015), so I only analyzed those two. I also analyzed the materials given to teachers of AP Economics from the College Board, as well as the past AP Microeconomics and Macroeconomics exams themselves. I used document analysis to look for political content and normative policy statements. My findings from textbook analysis were initially separate from my interview findings, but they were not robust enough on their own to

warrant a distinct subchapter, so I integrated my major findings into the discussion from interviewees on textbook choice.

I did not employ any major quantitative analysis, besides a few descriptive statistics in the literature review and in the descriptions of participants and their environments. Early on in the process of data-gathering, I was challenged by professors and peers to think of any possible way that I could use quantitative analysis in my project, and I could not think of one. Quantitative surveys about education often are asking questions of "who," "what," and "how many." Any survey that prompts meaningful answers to the questions of "why" or "how," as I asked, should inspire follow-up questions that have their own meaningful answers. This is the whole point behind the "semi" in semi-structured interview: leaving room for any outcome, because the value in a participant's perspective may not become clear until the interview has already begun. Especially for a project like mine, where the focus or even the research questions themselves did not materialize until very late into the process of data collection, it is important to be able to connect with each participant on a personal level and collect a story rather than an assortment of numbers and facts.

Participants

To participate in this study, teachers had to work at a public high school. I chose this restriction because public high schools tend more than private schools to restrict curricular freedom and deviance from standards, and can rarely afford to not offer and push AP enrollment due to high school ranking systems. Teachers also had to teach AP

Economics and have students taking the AP Microeconomics and Macroeconomics exams so that the teacher's relationship to the exam material could be discussed.

The participants were all white men except one who was black, and though they all taught in districts that are overall wealthy and majority white, they each taught at schools with different demographics. For example, at Valleyridge High School, where Mr. Sawford teaches, the AP exam pass rate exceeded 80% in May 2015, but that same year at Underwood High School which is in the same county, it was below 30%[7]. This is to be expected, as Valleyridge's student body is almost three-quarters White and Asian, which are historically high-achieving socioeconomic groups, with only 19% receiving free or reduced lunch, while Underwood's student body is only one-quarter White and Asian, with over 60% of students receiving free or reduced lunch (U.S. News & World Report 2017)[8].

Participants were not from the area nor had they gone to the high school in which they were teaching. I was surprised to find out that not one of the teachers had gone into teaching intending to teach AP Economics, or even economics in general, but had ended up continuing with AP Econ for at least 5 years after the high school had assigned them to

[7] The percentage of students receiving free- or reduced-lunch is commonly used in economic analyses of education policy as a proxy variable for the prevalence of poverty at a school.

[8] All statistics about high schools are from their entries in the U.S. News list of high schools. The specific URLs of each high school's entry are not listed to protect anonymity.

the class. This became an important finding as I investigated the prevalence of out-of-field placement (Klopfenstein 2003, 40–42) of AP Economics teachers as an institutional constraint on those teachers.

Mr. Tanner

Mr. Tanner is a white male in his early 40s who has taught at the same school since he was a student teacher about seventeen years ago. His school, Central Technical High School, offers 24 AP courses, enrolls just over 1,100 students, and is one of the few magnet schools in the county. Students who reside anywhere within the district may take an entrance exam and apply for attendance. Central Tech began as a vocational school but transitioned in the early 1990s into being a technical school. Now, each student receives a full high school diploma while also focusing in a career-oriented major which they choose as a sophomore. The school is ranked amongst the top 10 in the state, has an 81% AP pass rate with 72% participating in AP courses, and is 57% non-Hispanic white.

Mr. Tanner's parents were teachers, so he knew from an early age that teaching was a career that might interest him. However, his first job was stockbroking, which he did for a few years before beginning to teach. After a couple of years teaching, he was asked to teach AP Economics. He taught the first year, realized he needed a better grasp on the material, and started getting his Master's in Economics from a local university. Although he never finished this degree due to not writing a thesis, he did all the coursework and found it enormously helpful in the classroom. Over almost twenty years, he has come to see teaching as a twofold activity: firstly, teachers help students with content; and secondly, teachers help students grow up and learn to be responsible adults.

Especially in his AP Economics classroom, he feels strongly about teaching children to vote carefully and be knowledgeable about and involved in politics.

We agreed to meet at a Starbucks about 20 minutes away from his school. He requested that we meet at 7 PM on a Tuesday because he coaches football after school. He arrived wearing a dark green athletic polo that displayed Central Tech's logo. When he arrived, he asked if I wanted anything. I said no so he only got himself a black coffee and sat down at the high table where I had been setting up a microphone. He sipped his coffee and we began speaking. He answered each question completely but did not volunteer thoughts beyond what I had asked. There was a minor element of awkwardness sometimes, but he was incredibly cordial. He waited patiently each time I went off-script and had to improvise a follow-up question. Our conversation lasted a little under an hour.

Mr. Holton

Mr. Holton is a white male in his mid-30s. He grew up wanting to be an engineer but realized later in life that he wanted a more people-oriented job. Thinking back to when he had enjoyed working with children in the past, he decided to become a teacher. For Mr. Holton, it was between teaching math and teaching history, and—though he joked that he was probably better at math than he was at history—he chose history because he simply liked it better. He taught it for one year before realizing that he liked learning it more than he liked teaching it, so when the opportunity came in to switch from U.S. History with 11th graders to the county's standard-level economics class with 12th graders, he took the opportunity to continue with the same students for another year. The year after that, he picked up AP Economics and stuck with it for seven years at two

different schools. He also graded AP exams for the College Board for two years. For the 2017-2018 school year, he has switched back to U.S. History, this time for 8th grade, at a nearby middle school in the same county.

The school we talked most about was the one where he most recently taught AP Economics. Underwood High School is only a ten-minute drive from Central Tech where Mr. Tanner teaches, but serves a very different population. Underwood enrolls just under 1,000 students, only 23% of which are non-Hispanic white, and 61% of which are economically disadvantaged (using the free- or reduced-lunch metric). 24% of students take an AP course, and with a 50% pass rate. This means that only 12% of seniors have taken and passed an AP exam by the time they graduate. It is also considered a magnet school, but students must be within its residential zone to attend. It is one of the county's lowest-performing schools on state standardized tests in math and English.

We spoke in a Panera Bread near his current school, which is much more white and affluent than Underwood. It was 3:30 PM on a Thursday. He wore a gray t-shirt from his undergraduate alma mater. Soft rock played over the café's loudspeakers and we were surrounded by older white women, all sitting alone. Neither of us had drinks. Our conversation lasted much longer than an hour—in fact, closer to an hour and a half, but he was not anxious about silences or time and seemed to be willing to talk forever. Often, I would not even need to prompt with follow-up questions, as he would spin an answer into a related anecdote into another string on the same gigantic interlocking web of ideas.

Mr. Sawford

Mr. Sawford is a white male in his mid-60s. After graduating with a B.A. in Business, he worked as a regional manager at a large pizza chain for a while before deciding to pursue his lifelong dream of becoming a basketball coach. He knew being a teacher was a prerequisite to be a basketball coach in a public school, so he acquired a teaching degree at a local public university and taught Technology Education while establishing the basketball program at a low-performing school in the same county as Mr. Tanner and Mr. Holton. He eventually made his way to Valleyridge High School, one of the highest-performing classes in the county, and began teaching AP Economics along with AP Psychology and the county's standard-level economics course.

We met at the same Panera Bread where I had met Mr. Holton the day before and talked for about forty-five minutes before he had to return to his classroom to administer a make-up exam for a student who had been absent. I followed him there so that we could continue our conversation in his colleague's classroom, and we spoke for about another half hour. He peppered his answers with dry, sarcastic humor and was often self-deprecating, but overall his compassion for his students shone through with genuine appreciation of and pride in their potential and abilities.

Valleyridge High School is in the top 20 in the state, with 58% of its 1,800 students participating in APs and an 88% pass rate. Only 20% of students are economically disadvantaged, and nearly 60% are white.

Mr. Wright

Mr. Wright is a black man in his early 40s and the one participant from a different county than the rest. He was bald, had a beard, and wore a green polo and slacks. He had been at the same school since his second year of teaching and founded the AP Economics course about ten years ago. He has taught it ever since and is currently the only teacher of AP Economics at Quakermoor High School. He was a financial underwriter before becoming a teacher, so he had a quantitative background as well as having a minor in Business, but he asserted that he definitely had to learn economics anew to teach it for the first few years.

We arranged to meet on a Wednesday afternoon just after school let out, and he had to run detention in his classroom simultaneously. We sat just outside his classroom in the hallway and spoke for an hour. There were moments when a colleague of his would walk by, and he would grow quiet and trail off before resuming when the colleague had gotten out of earshot. I got the sense that while he felt comfortable speaking to me, there were certain topics and opinions that he might not want to be stating too publicly.

Quakermoor is in the top thirty schools in the state, with about 1,200 students. It is in an affluent area and about 86% non-Hispanic white. Only 14% of students are economically disadvantaged. Half of students take at least one AP exam with an 86% pass rate.

Below find a summary of participant and school information for easy reference.

Name	High school	AP Pass Rate	Years of AP Econ	Race	Age
Mr. Tanner	Central Technical High School	81%	~13-14	white	early 40s
Mr. Holton	Underwood High School	50%	7	white	mid-30s
Mr. Sawford	Valleyridge High School	88%	~15	white	mid-60s
Mr. Wright	Quakermoor High School	86%	~9-10	black	early 40s

Table 1. Participant Information

FINDINGS

In each of my conversations with participants, we spoke about teaching goals, politics, and pedagogical practices. During the actual interview, I was caught up in details (important ones, certainly, but details nonetheless) about constraints such as choices between textbooks, the rapid pace of the course, and the dependence of school funding on flawed ranking systems. It was not until I was poring over transcripts later that a pattern emerged that I had only barely registered while in the midst of the interviews: teachers of AP Economics recognized the politics in the curriculum's subject matter, but their classrooms were not environments where they felt comfortable or even wanted to speak explicitly or normatively about politics. In fact, they consciously took steps to make their classrooms more balanced and often did not disclose their personal political views to students. Participants identified all over the political spectrum, but all shared a common vision of teaching as helping to cultivate children's ability to function as responsible, informed, analytical citizens of the United States. Why, then, were they so unable and/or reluctant to connect the political content in their curriculum with their pedagogical practices? Upon close analysis of interview data, I found the reason to be twofold: one, the structure of the AP Economics course constrains teachers from being able to teach the course the way they would like to, and two, the pervasive neoliberal narrative of the public school teacher as apolitical prevents teachers from seeing the potential for using their classrooms as sites of resistance and social change.

Institutional Constraints

Before discussing what the institutional constraints on AP Economics teachers are, it is important to define exactly what it is that I mean by "institutional constraint." An institutional constraint is something that restricts individual and group behaviors and outcomes by the very nature of the institution that they are embedded in. I discuss several constraints that participants mentioned as impeding their ability to teach AP Economics in the way that they would like to: the overprovision of AP classes, the out-of-field appointment of teachers to AP Economics, the closeminded definition of rigor, the reductive concepts and models in the curriculum, and the available textbooks.

One institutional constraint is that public schools are dependent on reputation for funding (because they are funded in part by estate taxes, which depends on local real estate values) and to attract higher quality teachers, such that they are incentivized to promote the characteristics (like AP participation rate) that are rewarded by ranking systems such as the Challenge Index, operated by the Washington Post's Jay Mathews, with no regard for those characteristics that are not factored into the ranking (like AP pass rate). As an example, two participants made the point that public schools offer AP courses for purposes of competition or ranking, even when the students are not passing the exams at high rates and the AP teachers feel underprepared. Mr. Holton, recalling the Challenge Index, said that the ranking system is...

> essentially based on how many AP exams do you give. They don't care about what the results are, just if you give a boatload of exams then you get on the list. And you get to say your school's on the power ranking. "Oh, that sounds good." Even though nobody passes, you give a lot of AP exams. And

> so people fight to get on that list and you know, that's a problem with any ranking system that is gonna measure success in that kind of arbitrary way.

The reason that these rankings matter is because of the power they have to influence a school's reputation. Public image influences a school's socioeconomic resources, including by attracting wealthier residents and by improving standing within the community. A school with a good reputation will often also draw more qualified teachers, who will improve the school further, thus beginning a cycle of improvement. However, offering AP courses without ensuring quality of instruction and adequate prerequisites can often have more negative than positive consequences for both teachers and students.

Mr. Tanner offered a perspective from a lower-income school in the county where this phenomenon occurs even though nearly half of students are considered economically disadvantaged due to their eligibility for the free- or reduced-lunch program.

> Now, obviously, for kids that aren't prepared, like my wife teaches at another school in the county that's a weaker school, and they throw all kinds of kids in their AP and they get two things happen. One, kids want out, 'cause the teacher's teaching at too high a level and the kids either can't or will not rise to that challenge, or a situation where the teacher, trying to be sympathetic to the level the kids are at, lowers that level -- which is fine -- but then they're not gonna meet the bar at the end of the year and they have an abysmal pass rate. Their pass rate is, I don't know, 10 or 15 percent... and the teachers and the kids are in a tough spot there because they're getting placed into classes that they're really not prepared for, and even if they have the SATs to do well on those classes, most of the kids are not ready for that. I don't have a good answer to their problem.

This was a common thread among participants: not having a good solution to the problem of wanting to offer APs without being able to improve the pass rate. Teachers seemed to understand the conflicting incentives of the school administrators. Mr. Holton

conceded that "...no school wants to be saying like, hey we don't offer our students a chance to get this high-quality education or this rigorous education," but still emphasized that "a lot of those kids were not ready" for the AP classes they were encouraged to take by their school. The structure of tracking in early education has produced a hidden curriculum whereby elementary students are initially slotted into lower tracks and never get the high-quality education that could have advanced them into the same classes as their higher-performing peers who were placed into upper tracks earlier on. Then, in high school, administrators scramble to increase AP enrollment and push students into AP classes, thus trying to hop several tracks all at once.

As well as their students being unprepared, a common thread among the teachers was that they had either entered teaching as a second career or had not intended to teach economics when they began teaching. In fact, all four teachers admitted to teaching directly from the textbook for the first year that they taught the AP Economics course because they had never trained in economics and were asked to teach the course by their department. When I asked how Mr. Holton was able to teach a course with no prior knowledge, he replied:

> I read a lot. I just read a lot. I read a lot, I made friends that had been doing it for a long time... And then, like there are some online resources. There's a guy that does like a lot of YouTube videos that are really helpful. And then, yeah I just honestly I read a lot of Mankiw's book [laughs].

Mr. Holton's self-deprecating tone was echoed by Mr. Tanner, who humorlessly expressed a negative feeling from his experience in the first year he taught the course.

> I'm not lying to you when I was teaching right out of the textbook... the first year I couldn't even draw the graphs... it was not a good experience for me or the kids and I was embarrassed that I didn't know more...

The embarrassment that Mr. Holton felt may be indicative that his goals as a teacher were undermined by having to teach a course for which he was underprepared. Mr. Sawford experienced the same underpreparedness but saw it as an improvisational teaching opportunity. He sat on his hands and rocked back and forth as he spoke, looking surprisingly childlike for a 6'4" man in his mid-60s.

> I actually learned it a chapter ahead of the kids the first year. And it's funny because I was just talking to a teacher who was telling me -- an AP teacher, it's their first year – "well, some of these hard questions I don't give my kids because I don't know how to explain them." And I remember spending two hours on those type of questions 'cause I kept thinking, like, if I don't show it to 'em and they're on the AP exam, the kids will never have seen a question like that. And I really think I had a very, very kind first year class 'cause sometimes I had to go... "Hey, what do you guys think the answer is?" and they would explain it... I knew the answer but they explained it better than I could've 'cause I didn't know it. So they were really, really helpful.

Mr. Wright actually piloted the AP Economics course at his high school, where he had already been teaching for several years. His experience was therefore colored by the fact that he had no colleagues who had taught AP Economics before to mentor him at all.

> I tried to stay a week ahead... so a lot of the stuff that they were going through, I mean I knew most of the concepts but I couldn't just kinda go with it, I had to make sure I went through and knew everything before I taught it to them. Yeah, but I guess there's just growing pains with starting a new course.

None of the four participants had any expertise in economics. They had backgrounds in stockbroking, business, financial underwriting, and engineering. Most participants pursued an advanced teaching degree after their teaching career had already begun, and only one went back to school for economics once they had begun teaching AP Economics. They were asked to teach AP Economics because of departmental need, thus

implying that there were no other qualified candidates. It seems, then, that a good number of AP Economics teachers are not only *not* Economics majors, they also have not taken any Economics—if not ever, then at least for many years. They are asked by their schools' social studies departments to teach the course because of the underlying assumption in the rather general certification system: any current social studies teacher can teach any other social studies course without any further education or specialization. This sink-or-swim model matches the way that teachers are often learning to teach for only a relatively short amount of time before the full responsibility of their own classroom is thrust upon them (Lortie 1975, 59–60), which happens because of the nature of the institution that is teacher education in the United States. Teacher socialization largely happens on-the-job, as teacher education programs tend to be more generalized than specialized, and even beginner teachers are, for the most part, isolated from any sources of mentorship in their own classrooms (Lortie 1975, 60, 73).

Returning to the idea of underpreparedness as undermining teachers' goals, it is important to note the stated goals of each participant in their teaching practice. Three participants had goals such as wanting students to "grow as people and critical thinkers" (Mr. Holton), inspiring students to make the world a better place by not "chasing the dollar" (Mr. Sawford), and to "make the subject come alive" (Mr. Tanner).

With these goals in mind, it is easy to see how the fast-paced nature of the AP Economics course might feel constraining. Mr. Tanner wished for more time to insert topics like the Fight for $15 and teach his students about current economic research that empirically tests neoclassical theories.

> ...That's one unfortunate thing. We don't have enough time to do—I don't really do current events at all other than in passing, because we just sorta grind it out... One chapter a week, boom boom boom. So that's definitely not the way you're supposed to do it...
> And then the other thing you have to work in is all the AP multiple choice and the essays, so the tricky thing is... I see the kids maybe two and a half times a week. That's the A/B schedule. And on an average, two and a half. And I really need to see 'em maybe 3 and a half times for 80 minutes. So I have a lot more stuff that I wanna do with them than I have time for.

Mr. Holton was frustrated with how the speed of the course negatively affected his ability to teach skills that are related to economic analysis but that are not tested by the exam.

> I mean I try. Definitely examples, but not necessarily as many articles, right? Because you know every minute that you spend cracking on one of those skills—that's probably one of my gripes, that you spend a lot of time talking about the Fed and the actions that it's taking, whether in the 80s to combat inflation or now to combat recession, it takes time from—'cause those aren't skills that are tested, right? Know the tools, know how they work, know how they show up on the graph. It's not so important to talk about whether or not those tools are being used appropriately at any given time, which I think is a weakness.

Mr. Sawford described the course like "sprinting through a marathon." He told me that he has tried to incorporate more articles, but that he realized "...we're two weeks behind!" He regretted not being able to bring in articles and have class discussions about current events because that is what makes economics fun for students—the connection to the real-world that is less common in other courses. "I think you're cheated out of the conversations you would really enjoy," Mr. Sawford said, agreeing with Mr. Holton, who said, "...that's also the cool stuff about Econ that people get to debate about and that you have all these economists with all different ideas, right?"

Mr. Wright, having taught a non-AP Economics class before, wished there was room in the year for not only discussions, but also project-based learning like he could do with the regular-level class.

> ...In the regular-level econ class I have students do a lot of projects that they create, whether it's like a presentation or whether they get together in groups and do those types of projects. I think with the pace of the AP course, it doesn't allow for some of those things... it's much more of a structured "sit here we're gonna lecture on this topic, we're gonna practice the problem sets, and then we're gonna ask questions and then look at the graph." So it's a pace that you have to set and the only way to really get through all the coursework and all the material in the class is to stay on that pace... In the regular course of Econ, I can take a topic and we can look at it for an entire week and look at it from different perspectives and do a project on it, but yeah in AP it's like, we're gonna learn it today, we're gonna practice it tomorrow, and then there's gonna be a test on Friday. Just like, keep it moving.

In the AP Economics course, then, he feels more restricted than in the regular economics course. This makes sense, but offers the ominous implication that the AP Economics course is not suitable for customization to different learning styles and previously taken courses. Therein lies the rub. The equity- and access-focused expansion in the 80s and 90s set firmly in AP's mission an element of promotion of rigorous learning to students from all backgrounds. However, if the very structure of rigorous learning, including a definition of rigor that merely means asking students to absorb and reproduce vast quantities of information, only allows for certain types of learning, then invariably certain students will be underserved by the curriculum. The history of AP's development and who it aimed to serve—elite white, upper-class college-bound boys—makes it likely that those left behind are those for whom AP was never intended to begin with.

The goals of the College Board in offering AP Economics may be inferred from the process by which it was developed and implemented in high schools around the country as presented in Chapter 2, but an equally important question for this topic is what teachers see as the goals of the College Board. Several mentioned the goals of giving students a taste of what a college-level economics course would be like or of allowing students to skip their Introduction to Economics courses and get ahead earlier on. Mr. Wright in particular pointed at a contradiction in the College Board's stated goals of equity and selectivity.

> ...They wanna increase participation in the AP classes that they provide. I think in doing that it tends to water down the course because I know in our school, like the first few years that we actually taught the course, it was very select, the kids that were actually in the course. We've kinda opened that up because there's a lot of incentives for high schools to have as many students take the AP exams as possible... So I've seen over the years that the type of students that I've gotten have not been at the same level as I saw in some of the earlier years, which is good and bad because you want even average-level students to have AP course experience, but then you also want to make sure the course is paced at the point where those high-level students are getting what they need to be successful on the exam, so you kinda have to balance those things. So I think in the College Board, I sense a little bit of confusion in terms of what direction they wanna go with it. Do they wanna increase participation or do they wanna keep the course at such a high level that it's gonna really model a college-level economics course, which really should be the goal of any AP course?

Mr. Holton's goals in AP Econ were related to the teacher as gatekeeper (Rowland and Shircliffe 2016) in that he revealed that he did think of his students as academically incapable, but he nuanced the issue by highlighting their disadvantaged status in order to lament their lack of exposure to high expectations.

> This is what the tests are gonna look like and this is gonna mirror what's gonna happen come AP test time in May. So my goal was to try to get them ready to be able to understand and appreciate the expectations that they

> were gonna face when they went to college. That was my biggest goal. When I was... dealing with those AP Econ kids, I wanted to them to understand what they were in store for because a lot of them were like "I wanna go to college. I wanna be this or that" and I was like "that's great," but they did not have the academic skills that they needed. And not even did they not have the skills, they didn't even know that there were people out there with that expectation of them.

Several teachers, in expressing their regret over the AP Economics course's flaws, softened their criticisms by hoping that their course would inspire college coursework or further thought in economics. Mr. Holton, for one, said:

> ...Hopefully it's not their last experience with Econ. Hopefully it does leave them thinking about this throughout life, that they kind of have this really critical and skeptical eye, and that they take into account a lot of variables when they're looking at why things happen.

Mr. Wright gets students coming back to visit after spending some time in college, and some have gone on to take further courses in economics. He spoke with pride about how they view the course as he taught it.

> ...They always come back and they give me feedback of how the AP Econ course made that coursework an absolute breeze. I mean, they tell me, "Wright, I used my exact notes from the class" and "I was sharing notes with the other students" and like, "where did you get this stuff," and "it was one of the easiest classes I had based on what I covered last year."

Mr. Tanner, at an AP reading session, encountered a professor from one of the Seven Sisters colleges who spoke to him and other AP Economics teachers about the introductory nature of the course. His particular anecdote flagged a key institutional constraint: the reductive curriculum of AP Economics.

> He was saying, "Look. You guys are teaching 'em stuff that's in some cases not even true, but you're the introductory course, okay. And you are there to kind of whet their appetite and try and kinda like the carnival barker, we're trying to get you in the tent. So if we do a good job trying to interest you, then perhaps you will be interested in majoring in it down the line." So

> his point was that some of the stuff that we go over has been discredited and the PhDs in Economics do not agree with. But he said that's okay. He said, "Keep doing what you're doing because it's stuff that they can handle. Stuff that the PhD's can handle is so hard and so abstract that the kids would be just totally -- they'd give up. They would give up. Totally hopeless." So I looked at that and I said, yeah.

The models used in AP Economics are indeed often simplified and unrealistic. The teachers themselves saw this as an institutional constraint in that it is unfortunate, but there is nothing they can do about it—the students simply cannot learn the more complicated, more realistic models in the time they are given. The AP exam does not reward any extra credit for more in-depth analysis, so there is no incentive for teachers to spend time giving students a more nuanced lesson on a model. Teachers had varied views on whether the simplified models of economic markets that AP Econ teaches tends liberal or conservative. Mr. Tanner, the one self-identified Republican of the participants, did not see the curriculum as inherently politicized.

> I don't really see the politics in it. If there was any politics, I would say they hit the Keynesianism pretty hard and they don't really hit classical economics as hard. So perhaps it's a little liberal-skewed but to me, the kids don't pick up on that unless I would want them to pick up on it. I just tell them, look, Keynesian is the Democrats, that's something that they would be proponents of and then the classical would be more the Republicans. And the way I put it to the k-- I happen to be a Republican, but I tell the kids: look, they both work, okay, but there's different times when one works and the other is not as effective.

On the other end of the spectrum, Mr. Sawford, who is a self-proclaimed far-left liberal, saw the curriculum as conservative-leaning, and found that most of the politics are in the textbook used (and he used Mankiw's) or are inherent to the models, such as the model of minimum wage as a price floor.

> ...We read Mankiw, who's a leading conservative economist so yeah, I think he's going to have a slanted view. I remember one year a student couldn't read it so I gave him Krugman's book. Thought Mankiw was too conservative. I also think in basic economics, even when we're doing minimum wage, it immediately says "People are gonna lose jobs. Minimum wage is bad." That's the underlying current because you're not really looking at different elasticities and different—you're just doing simple models. So I think Econ 101 is a conservative-based course.

The difference in how these teachers view the curriculum could have to do with many factors, such as their own political views, the political views of their students or surrounding community, how politically involved or active they are, the amount of economics training they have, and so on. Finding a definitive reason for why it is that these teachers are viewing the same curriculum in polar-opposite ways would require more data. For now, we can delve into Mr. Sawford's point about textbooks.

Every teacher, no matter his political leaning or race, uses or has used more than one textbook for class. The two most commonly used among participants are Gregory Mankiw's *Principles of Economics* (2014) and Margaret Ray, et al.'s *Krugman's Economics for AP®* (2015). Mr. Sawford gives the students Mankiw to read and uses Krugman for his lecture slides. Mr. Holton started with Mankiw but switched to Krugman for readability, and keeps one by McConnell, Brue, and Flynn (2017) to read himself if he needs to fully understand a concept. Mr. Tanner also started with Mankiw (which he recognized as conservative), but switched to McConnell/Brue/Flynn for comprehensiveness. Mr. Wright actively and explicitly uses both the Mankiw and the Krugman in order to provide two different political perspectives for the students to consider.

> One of the textbooks that we use is Mankiw's textbook, and he's got a very conservative approach to a lot of the economics topics. But then I'll also use Paul Krugman's AP Econ edition as well, so we kinda balance it that way...

> 'cause economics gets political... One comes from a conservative perspective and one from a liberal perspective... There's opinions but a lot of economics topics you can argue either way, so when you look at it and talk about it, you can have a valid argument on both sides of that as long as we're using data that we found, and looking at the issue.

The economists that Mr. Wright mentions are politically open outside of their textbooks. Mankiw, an economics professor at Harvard, is one of the leading conservative economists. Krugman, an economics professor at the City University of New York, is one of the leading liberal economists and has a weekly column in the New York Times. His textbook was originally written for undergraduate use, but was modified by Margaret Ray and David Anderson for use with the AP Economics course. While both of their textbooks are less overtly political than the authors themselves are as public figures, both textbooks still lean conservative. We may take their discussions of the minimum wage as an example[9]. Mankiw admits to the validity of some liberal arguments, but ultimately argues that the majority of minimum wage earners are teenagers earning extra spending money, implying that the inefficiency created by a high minimum wage is not worth the improvements to the standard of living for low-income earners (Mankiw 2014, 608). Krugman, whose textbook is less conservative than Mankiw's, still gives more page space to conservative arguments than liberal ones and often ends a section with the conservative argument, as if giving it final say (Ray et al. 2015, 132). Whether a teacher uses Krugman, Mankiw, or both, politicized arguments exist in the textbook even as the textbook writer attempts to present both sides of the public and economists' debate

[9] For an explanation of the neoclassical model of the minimum wage as a price floor in the market for labor, see the Appendix.

about minimum wage. This is troubling because some of the participants' assert that their classrooms are not political, and in fact are explicitly neutral. It is clear, however, that that is likely not the case because of the inability to select a neutral text and the difficulty of ensuring either an absence or balance of political arguments, along with each of the other institutional constraints and the omnipresence of the hidden curriculum.

Teacher Narrative Constraints

One particular institutional constraint that I would like to highlight is that of the narrative of teaching as an apolitical act. Even if all of the previously named institutional constraints were removed, would my participants be invested in making their classrooms political spaces of resistance against reproducing systems of oppression? I found that the apolitical teacher narrative prevents teachers from including explicitly political elements in their curricula, or if they do include political elements, from taking partisan stances. Mr. Tanner in particular was concerned about the role that politics can play in class discussions.

> ...Especially with President Trump and even with President Obama I try to stay off of politics because it's such a hot-button issue. People were very much strongly for or against each president and that's not really—you know, even in Government, while theoretically we should talk about that, it'd get so heated and the kids get so adversarial, I think to me it almost detracts because then people just go red with anger both ways, and it just seems like it takes something away. So maybe that's probably the wrong answer, but to me—and I know other people that teach social studies in our building are trying to stay away from it too, just because it gets so nasty so fast. It degenerates and you know how sometimes 17-year-olds can be. They don't remember anything but that kid that slighted 'em.

Mr. Wright, on the other hand, actively welcomes politics in his classroom. He enjoys the spirited political debates that economic issues can bring up for students who

might not be otherwise engaged, even while trying to keep his own political views out of the discussion. To be specific, I asked if there was a rule that teachers could not tell their students who they voted for in his school district, as there was in mine.

> ...Last year during the election when I taught government, I got the question every single day. "Mr. Wright, who are you voting for? Who did you vote for?" And I would never tell 'em, I would say "The best person. The best candidate." But no, there's never been any pressure that I've felt about expressing your political views, I think that when you do do that, you kinda open yourself up for people thinking that you're biased and not teaching things in a balanced format.
> I do remember after the election, there was a memo that came out to teachers about kind of watching the kind of the rhetoric or the things they talked about in terms of you know the new president, in terms of the election. I didn't really follow that because I mean in a government you have to talk about the election. So you're not gonna tell me not to talk about the election in a government class, that's what we do. So I think in other courses though... if you're in science class or if you're in math class, and we're debating Donald Trump, yeah that might be a little bit off-topic. But in government class, or even in an econ class, depending on how we're looking at different policies, I can always justify having a political discussion.

Mr. Sawford was less willing to actively set aside space and time for political discussions in his classroom, but seemed willing to teach students about politics more generally. He was actually happy to come in on the day after the 2016 Presidential Election and applaud the newly politically active, and he often uses techniques to teach models he disagrees with where the students are led to find their own disagreements. However, he held strong to the conviction that teachers should not indoctrinate, but rather, give students the skills to form their own opinions.

> ...One of my best friends thinks his job is to turn everyone into a liberal. I don't think that's my job as a teacher. Maybe as a parent. I like to tell my kids I'm conservative because they always do the opposite of what I tell 'em. [laughs] But I think as a teacher, my job is to get you to think about things

> to come to your own—like you guys are adults. Think of things and come to your own conclusion. I don't know.

Mr. Sawford's disagreement with his friend over the role of the teacher points to a common debate about whether teaching is inherently value-transmitting. Though many education scholars are proponents of the hidden curriculum framework, and thus do not believe that teaching has the potential to be an apolitical act, teachers themselves seem to be leaning towards the narrative of teaching as neutral even as they feel the course content pulling towards politicization.

When I asked the last question of the interview, which was if he intends for his students to be able to guess his political views, Mr. Holton spoke at length about different political situations he had dealt with in his various classrooms. He had an all-black class in 2008, the year President Obama was first elected. He had had a white Trump supporter in an otherwise all-black classroom. Now that he teaches at a middle school, he worries that his students go home and tell their parents "Mr. Holton's all about raising taxes!" because they are, in his view, less politically apathetic than the high school students he has worked with. As he listed the various environments he had been in over the years, it was clear that my question had brought up a struggle that he had been thinking about a lot.

> I didn't talk about Trump hardly at all, unless it was in those very specific like Econ-related moments, because how do I tell a group of kids -- how do I speak objectively? How does one speak objectively, if we're talking about someone's comments about sexually assaulting someone? How am I supposed to be like, "oh, you know, you gotta understand, he's just saying that." ...When somebody's like not able to condemn white supremacy stuff, how am I supposed to be like "well, you know, you're entitled to your opinion on that." ...Or like infowars stuff, where we got people that are

> denying that shooting massacres actually happened. Like how do I objectively deal with this if it's nonsense?

Political disagreements are often either described as a matter of opinion (or, as in economics, as a matter of different empirical estimates) or as a denial of another person's humanity. Usually, disagreements that deny humanity are about systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and classism. In the case of the teacher moderating a political discussion, impromptu or not, it may very well be that some students will express views that uphold systems of oppression. It may also be that some students are victims of the very same mechanisms of subjugation and inequality that their peers implicitly support. Even if the political discussions happen outside of the classroom, it may feel disingenuous to pretend as though they are not happening, as though the classroom exists in a vacuum separate from the very real issues that affect a teacher's students. Mr. Holton's point echoes the cognitive dissonance that I surmised might be guiding teachers in their decisions to be explicitly political or not. Mr. Tanner, the only Republican participant, said of explicitly political discussion:

> And then one thing I tell them too is, I don't try to talk politics but I say, "Look. As young people you wanna vote for whichever party gives the economy the best shot at growth because it's in your self-interest." And I'll explain to them, a growing economy versus say, Greece where the economy's shrinking or stagnating and then there's no job opportunities and all that brain drain. They have to go elsewhere in Europe or they have to go to the United States or Asia to get work, and I mean that's no good. And I said, I'm not telling you Republican or Democrat but you have to vote for economic growth, at least in my opinion, as a young person. And that's something that will decide...which party they feel is offering that.

He thus implied that from his point of view, the Republican Party is the one which gives the economy the best shot at growth. This is presumably because of the Republican

Party's historical and stated commitment to a small government deficit and policies that attempt to facilitate private sector growth. However, the single-issue style of voting that he encourages his students to follow will likely call to mind the Republican Party more often than the Democratic for most people, given that Democrats are recently most known for social issues and stimulating the economy via government spending, thus running a larger deficit and increasing government debt. The claim of neutrality, then, or of not "talking politics" does not seem possible when examining the connotations behind encouraging voting for economic growth.

Teachers are aware of the political content in the AP Economics course and they see the potential for teaching for social justice in the curriculum, but they do not use their classrooms to teach politically. While there are valid and seemingly immovable institutional constraints on teachers of AP Econ, I argue that they do not seem to want to pursue politically active teaching for social justice, and likely will not until the cultural narrative of teaching as a neutral, apolitical act is unlearned from the institutions of teaching and teacher education.

CONCLUSION

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What are the mechanisms causing teachers to feel constrained by the structure of AP Economics?
2. What role does the narrative of the apolitical teacher play in influencing teachers in whether they view their pedagogy as political?

I have argued that teachers feel unable to teach AP Economics in the way that they would like to because of institutional constraints that are embedded into the structure of the AP program (schoolwide, district-level, and nationally) and the curriculum of the AP Economics course. I found these constraints to be: the overprovision of AP classes, the out-of-field appointment of teachers to AP Economics, the closeminded definition of rigor, the reductive concepts and models in the curriculum, and the available textbooks.

Challenges, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

First and foremost, it was a challenge to revise my expectations and research questions after data collection had already ended. If I had had the opportunity to do more interviews later that were customized for the new research questions, I may have gotten richer data. As it stands, I was able to work with what I had, and luckily my interview questions were open-ended enough to allow for participants to express what they felt strongest about. Conveniently, what they felt strongest about were usually the most important issues facing AP Economics teachers. In this way, the interview process was co-constructed between researcher and participant.

It would have been helpful to have in-classroom data, gathered from a six-month or year-long classroom observation, but that was beyond the scope of this study. To compensate, I asked teachers extensively during the interviews about their classroom dynamic and experience and used textbooks as data sources that show how certain topics and concepts are taught, practiced, and perhaps nuanced.

More participants might have offered more diverse perspectives, and it would have been particularly useful to have women and more teachers of color. While the focus of this study shifted towards institutional constraints once I realized that my participants were not teaching politically, it would have been illuminating to share the story of teachers who were willing and able to make their classrooms sites of resistance against conservativism and neoliberalism. *Why are they able to make time for political content? How did they come to reject the cultural narrative of teaching as apolitical?*

Further studies could aim to include social justice teachers, more ethnically and gender-diverse participants, and more participants in general.

Recommendations

It is at once both easier and harder to make recommendations for policy change for the first type of institutional constraint that I found. If the school cannot support a large quantity of AP courses, perhaps it should not offer AP Economics until they have an in-field teacher who is experienced with that specific course. However, schools cannot do such a thing without garnering suspicion from the community and likely worsening their reputation. It seems fruitless to recommend that the Washington Post's Challenge Index incorporate AP pass rate as a weighted factor in their rankings, given that I am sure they

have received many letters and emails about it. It also seems pointless to suggest that it is possible to convince mobile families with school-age children to not consult school rankings when considering where they will move. The nature of the institutional constraint is that it is difficult to enact change to remove it; it is embedded in the structures of the institution within which it resides. However, there are a few changes that I will recommend in order to lighten the grip of the institutional constraint that is time. My participants felt that they did not have enough time to bring in outside materials or allot days for political discussions or projects. While I cannot increase the number of hours in a day, I can recommend certain steps towards redefining rigor by increasing the amount of time that students have to learn and work with the material.

College Board

The College Board could implement either of the policies suggested by Mr. Holton. Either they could offer a winter test for AP Microeconomics, and continue to offer AP Macroeconomics in the spring, or they could offer both tests but encourage schools to teach AP Microeconomics and AP Macroeconomics in separate years.

Schools

College Board policy does not in itself disallow schools from teaching AP Microeconomics and Macroeconomics over a year each rather than both in one year, but schools may feel pressured to do so due to long-standing precedents. If a school's administration is willing to experiment without pre-established examples, then it may be a good site to push for an expansion to a two-year AP Economics course. A two-year course is likely to increase pass rates and provide a more enriched curriculum for

students. The opportunity cost is that the AP Economics teacher has to deal with two different courses running at the same time, which may be burdensome, but if the school has funds to provide support or even hire another teacher, it may well be worth it in indirect financial returns.

APPENDIX

The AP Economics Exam

Some explanation of the way the AP Economics course works may be useful. The two-part course is taught over one year, with both the AP Microeconomics and AP Macroeconomics exams proctored during the May examination season. This means that teachers must schedule the course carefully throughout the year such that whichever half is done first—Microeconomics or Macroeconomics—can be reviewed at the end of the year before the exams. AP exams are also scheduled in mid-May, which is a few weeks before most high schools finish their semesters. Generally, then, AP courses are more rushed than standard courses. There is also the need to teach materials with a two-pronged approach: first, learning the concept itself; and second, learning how to answer potential test questions about the concept.

The tests themselves are split into two sections. Section I contains 60 multiple-choice questions, takes one hour and ten minutes, and counts for two-thirds of the overall score. Section II is 3 free-response questions, takes one hour (with a ten-minute reading period), and counts for one-third of the overall score. The free-response questions include one long and two short, and are intended to test students' ability to "analyze unique scenarios using course concepts" (College Board 2017c, 2017d).

The Minimum Wage Model

The concept of minimum wage is taught in introductory economics courses as a flat price floor in the aggregate market for labor. The model conceptualizes labor as a product that is provided by sellers (laborers) at a price (wage) to buyers (employers). Minimum wages only have negative consequences if they are binding. For example, if the natural long-run wage that the market settles on is $10, but the minimum wage is set at $12, then the wage is binding—that is, it has an effect. A binding minimum wage will create inefficiency in the market due to mutually beneficial transactions that were outlawed by the price floor. There are laborers who would work for a wage between $10 and $12, and there are employers who would hire laborers for those wages, but they are not able to make that trade because of the minimum wage at $12. This creates a surplus: there are more people willing to provide labor at the minimum wage than there are people willing to buy it. This surplus is what causes inefficiency in the market for labor.

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