

The 1619 Project: Utilizing the Theory of Planned Behavior to Enhance Preservice Agricultural Science Educators' Perception of Multiculturalism

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Introduction

The 1619 Project explores the complexities of being an African American in the United States. As of fall 2020, more than 3,500 classrooms in the United States have used lesson plans designed around the 1619 Project in their curriculum (Riley, 2020). Through the podcast, college and high school teachers have an additional resource to utilize and aid them in teaching Black history's nuances (Patterson & McWhorter, 2020). The 1619 Project provides a critical context that is often missing from contemporary explanations of United States history in K-12 schools and American agriculture history (Bridgeforth, 2021).

The podcast starts with the advent of slavery within the United States. Nikole Hannah-Jones, who hosted the 1619 Project, soberingly explains that soon-to-be-sold slaves would "heave themselves over the walls of wooden ships to swim one last time with their ancestors" (Hannah-Jones, 2020). This moment quickly sets the podcast's tone and puts into perspective the atrocities committed in the name of profits during the slave trading era and how agriculture played a role.

Three of the 1619 Project's six episodes explore the racial injustices within agriculture at various moments in time. Hannah-Jones' storytelling allows the listener to gain greater insight into how agriculture and race interact. Hannah-Jones interviewed Khalil Gibran Muhammad, a history professor at Harvard, who discussed the most prominent civil rights settlement in history (Hannah-Jones, 2020). The settlement between Black farmers who sued the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) surrounded the accessibility of crop loans. In the 1990s, the USDA provided White farmers with loans with little to no inconvenience than Black farmers (Hannah-Jones, 2020). Black farmers faced discrimination, and the Black farmers were told that they owed too much money to receive this funding, or the local USDA county committee would discourage them from applying. The conversation between Hannah-Jones and Muhammad is essential in understanding how race plays a role in agriculture and is an imperative lesson that needs to be taught.

Undergraduate students were assigned to listen to the entire six-episode podcast. Once the students listened to the podcast, students were asked to reflect upon what they had learned. The students were asked various questions surrounding the podcast that included describing the emotions they experienced while listening and the reflection that immediately followed. Additionally, a safe space was created that allowed students to speak on their feelings relating to the podcast freely, explained how slavery and agriculture connect, the residual effects, and an opportunity to learn about the Black Lives Matter movement.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) emerged as an appropriate framework for evaluating students' understanding of the events discussed in the 1619 Project. The TPB explains that three determinants influence a student's intention: attitudes towards behaviors, the subjective norms regarding behavior, and perceived behavioral control. Ajzen (1991) explains that if an individual has a positive attitude, supportive subjective norms, and a powerful sense of behavioral control, one is more likely to have strong intentions to change their current behavior. However, if there is an inconsistency in any of the three contributing factors, it may result in weak discretions. Therefore, the student is less likely to complete the desired behavior.

Methods

Students enrolled in a multicultural agricultural education course at the University of [State] listened to the 1619 Project podcast and engaged in small group discussions (Mishra, 2016) during two lab meetings, equivalent to two hours. The researchers utilized a qualitative case study approach to synthesize the exchanges through these interviews. Yin (2018) defines a case study's parameters as an investigation into a phenomenon where real-world context is evident where multiple sources of evidence and data are sufficiently collected. The researchers took field notes of the conversations that were taking place. Additionally, the students enrolled in the course wrote reflections surrounding the topics discussed in the podcast.

Results to Date

Attitude towards behavior expresses one's positive or negative evaluation of performing a given behavior, entailing to consider the outcomes of performing the behavior (Eck et al., 2021). In the interviews, one student stated, "It hurts to know that there are farmers who love agriculture just like my family and me, and the fact that they lost their family farms because they were being discriminated against is heartbreaking." The attitude expressed by this student surrounded one of disdain towards their parents' understanding of race.

Subjective norms reflect a personal perception of the social expectations to adopt a given behavior (Gorgievski et al., 2018). One student stated, "My parents never talked to me about race while I was growing up, and I do not know if they would listen to the podcast. For myself, it opened my eyes." The subjective norms resonate with students when listening to the 1619 Project.

Perceived behavioral control reflects a personal belief about how easy or difficult performing the behavior may be for one to change (Chumbley et al., 2019). One student commented, "I didn't even know about the murder of Emmett Till and its significance until listening to this podcast. I feel like this is something I should've known a long time ago. How can we stop this from happening again?" The student expresses that they may not be able to stop hate crimes in the future.

The behavioral intent of changing behavior is present in the students' interviews. After listening to the podcast, several preservice teachers stated that they are more willing to "support" African American farmers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers analyzed the interviews by utilizing TPB by conducting this case study. TPB is an effective tool in changing preservice teachers' perceptions of multiculturalism. The attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavior control, and behavioral intent elements appeared in these interviews.

Africans during slavery curated the agricultural industry. Unfortunately, this painful history has created a distance among African Americans today. Taking the time to reflect on a dismal history gives listeners of the podcast insight and access to a different side of the story. It is breaking down the barriers of entry to racism and the effects it has had on those in the agricultural industry.

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