

# Making History Matter: Research Methods and Data Appendix

To arrive at the recommendations described in the Strategic Brief, we applied Strategic Frame Analysis®—an approach to communications research and practice that yields strategies for shifting the discourse around social issues. This approach has been shown to increase understanding of, and engagement in, conversations about scientific and social issues.

This work builds on earlier research we conducted that involved interviews with members of the public and experts about history and its value in society, which is described in a separate brief and methods appendix.

Below, we describe the research conducted in which we designed and tested frames to address the challenges in public thinking about history and its value in society and leverage the opportunities. These frames were tested in 2020–2021 and refined using three methods: on-the-screen (OTS) interviews, a survey experiment, and peer-discourse sessions (PDS). In total, 5,062 people were included in this research.

## Frame Design

To identify effective ways of communicating about history and its value in society, FrameWorks researchers specified a set of tasks the frames needed to address and then brainstormed potential reframing strategies that might accomplish one or more of these tasks (for example, metaphors, values, and issue frames). After generating a list of candidate framing ideas to test, researchers solicited feedback on these ideas from project partners to ensure the frames were both apt and potentially usable for those working in the field. Based on this feedback, researchers refined a set of frames and brought them into empirical testing.

## On-the-screen Interviews

Frame design was followed by a set of OTS interviews conducted over Zoom in May 2020 to explore potential framing tools with members of the public. FrameWorks researchers conducted 54 brief, one-on-one interviews with members of the public from across the United States. A diverse sample of participants was recruited in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, education level, and political party identification.

We first asked participants to respond to open-ended questions about history and its value in society. Participants were then presented with different metaphors and asked questions that explored the frames' abilities to restructure understanding, open up new ways of thinking, and give people productive language to use in discussing the issue. A list of candidate metaphors we tested are itemized below:

**Candidate metaphors:**

- Drawing maps
- Processing raw materials
- Exploring earth
- Detective work
- Mosaic
- Landscape
- Machine
- Building

## Survey Experiment

After analyzing how the candidate frames performed in OTS interviews, FrameWorks researchers refined the frames to bring forward for testing in the survey experiment. We conducted two online survey experiments to test the effectiveness of frames on public understanding and policy support. These experiments were conducted in December 2020 and March 2021. We gleaned some initial insights from the first wave, and we then updated and changed the survey instrument for the second wave to reflect these insights. Here, we're displaying evidence from wave 2 since this wave informed the specific framing recommendations outlined in the strategic brief. The demographics and sample questions below are from the second wave. The first wave of the experiment included 2,482 respondents and the second wave included 2,490 respondents for a total of 4,972 respondents. The respondents were US residents matched to national quotas for age, gender, race/

ethnicity, household income, education level, and political party identification. See below for more information about the sample composition from the second wave.

In each experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to a treatment or control condition. Those assigned to a control condition received no message. Those assigned to treatment conditions received a message framed with a particular frame element (for example, "this issue is about" frames, values frames, or metaphor frames).

After receiving no message (in the control condition) or receiving the framed message (in the treatment conditions), all respondents were asked an identical series of questions designed to measure understanding, attitudes, and policy preferences related to history and its value in society. Questions were Likert-type items with five- or seven-point scales, forced choice questions ("Which statement is closer to your opinion?" with two possible answers), or open-ended questions requiring free-text answers that were presented in a random order. For analysis, responses to these questions were aggregated to a set of composite measures, or "batteries." Example questions from the second wave are shown below.

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether there were significant differences in responses to questions between the treatment group and the control group. To ensure that any observed effects were driven by the frames rather than demographic variations in the sample, all regressions controlled for the demographics mentioned above. A threshold of  $p < 0.05$  was used to determine whether treatments had any significant effects. Significant differences were understood as evidence of a frame effect on the particular outcome (for example, understanding about the issue, attitudes around the issue, policy support).

## Sample composition

### Demographics Percent of sample in wave 2 (n=2,490)

<b>Gender</b>	
Female	53%
Male	47%
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	
White (non-Hispanic/Latino)	69%
Hispanic or Latino	12%
Black/African American	12%
Asian	5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<1%
Other/Biracial or multiracial	2%
<b>Education level</b>	
Less than high-school diploma	2%
High-school diploma	25%
Some college or Associate's degree	37%
Bachelor's degree	23%
Graduate degree	12%
<b>Household income</b>	
\$0–\$24,999	17%
\$25,000–\$49,000	28%
\$50,000–\$99,000	34%
\$100,000–\$149,000	14%
\$150,000 or more	8%
<b>Political party identification</b>	
Extremely liberal	7%
Fairly liberal	10%
Slightly liberal	9%
Moderate	33%
Slightly conservative	14%
Fairly conservative	17%
Extremely conservative	10%

## Desired communications outcomes: understanding, attitudes, and policy support

Below is a list of sample questions used in the second wave of the survey experiment.

Scales	Sample question
<b>Understanding of what historical interpretation entails</b>	Which statement is closer to your opinion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Our understanding of past events remains the same once we identify key facts.</li> <li>— Our understanding of past events is continually changing and being updated.</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding the importance of learning about history</b>	Which statement is closer to your opinion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Learning history is less important than learning math and science.</li> <li>— Learning history is just as important as learning math and science.</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding the importance of history to society</b>	Which statement is closer to your opinion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— To create a fairer society, we need to stop focusing on the past and instead think about what kind of society we want to create in the future.</li> <li>— To create a fairer society, we must learn about and think critically about past injustices in order to know what to do in the future.</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding the need for a shared, inclusive history of the United States</b>	As a country, we have done almost nothing to face the injustices in our past, such as slavery and genocide. <i>[7-point Likert scale: Strongly disagree; Disagree; Slightly disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Slightly agree; Agree; Strongly agree]</i>
<b>Understanding collective efficacy of engaging with history</b>	How optimistic or pessimistic are you that we, as a society, can make sure that everyone learns about and understands our past? <i>[7-point Likert Scale: Extremely pessimistic; Pessimistic; Somewhat pessimistic; Neither optimistic nor pessimistic; Somewhat optimistic; Optimistic; Extremely optimistic]</i>
<b>Understanding solutions to engage the public in history (general)</b>	Which statement is closer to your opinion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— The US government already gives enough funding to museums and historical sites; it should fund scientific endeavors instead.</li> <li>— We need the US government to give more funding to museums and historical sites so we can improve our understanding of history.</li> </ul>
<b>Understanding solutions to engage the public in history (equity-focused)</b>	Which statement is closer to your opinion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— K–12 schools already have enough in their history textbooks and don't need to include anything else.</li> <li>— K–12 schools should have history textbooks that make it a priority to include diverse accounts from women and Black and Indigenous people who lived in the past.</li> </ul>

## Frames Tested

### Metaphor conditions:

#### Drawing Maps:

##### Making Sense of the Past is Like Drawing Maps

Making sense of the past is like drawing maps. To draw maps that are reliable, we need specific kinds of tools and strategies, as well as many different sources of information—about the nature of different terrains, different landmarks, and the roads that connect them. In the same way, historians use different sources of evidence and a range of methods to identify how past events and moments are connected to each other and why they are relevant to us today. And just as maps change over time as we learn new information about the world around us, what we know about the past changes as new evidence comes to light and historians apply new perspectives to better understand it.

By drawing maps of the past, historians can help us understand who we are as a society and help us navigate the choices we must make for our society, now and in the future.

#### Detective Work:

##### Making Sense of the Past is Like Doing Detective Work

Making sense of the past is like doing detective work. To conduct investigations, detectives use a range of tools and techniques. They collect evidence and piece it together to form an understanding of events they weren't able to witness themselves. In the same way, historians use different sources of evidence and a range of methods to investigate how past events and moments are connected to each other and why they are relevant to us today. And just like detectives update what they know as they receive new information, historians' understanding of the past changes as new evidence comes to light and they apply new perspectives to better understand it.

Like detectives, historians conduct investigations to make sense of the past. Their work can help us understand who we are as a society and make informed choices for it, now and in the future.

#### Medicine:

##### Making Sense of the Past is Like Developing Medical Knowledge

Making sense of the past is like developing medical knowledge. Medical researchers use a range of approaches and techniques to improve health by understanding how the body works. In the same way, historians use a range of methods to research how the events and moments from the past are connected to each other and why they are relevant to us today. And just as what we know about medicine changes over time as researchers learn more about the body and advance their techniques, historians' understanding of the past changes as new evidence comes to light and they apply new perspectives to better understand it.

Medical researchers use research to understand how the body works. In a similar way, historians use research to identify how our society works and make informed choices for it, now and in the future.

#### Processing Raw Materials:

##### Making Sense of the Past is Like Processing Raw Materials

Making sense of the past is like processing raw materials. To be useful, raw materials like aluminum and copper need to be processed with the appropriate tools and technologies. This allows them to be developed into the things we need and use, like cell phones. In the same way, past events and moments need to be processed so we can understand how they're relevant to our lives today. This is what historians do: they process the raw materials of the past to bring out new meaning about what happened and how it affects us today. And just as processing raw materials like metals requires cutting-edge technologies, historians'

understanding of the past requires them to use up-to-date methods and apply new perspectives to better understand it.

Historians can help us process what happened in the past. Their work can help us understand who we are as a society and help us make informed choices for it, now and in the future.

## **Value conditions:**

### **Progress:**

#### **Understanding the Past Helps Society Move Forward**

In our society, we are committed to making progress—we are always looking to learn more and do better. But currently in the United States, most people don't have a complete understanding of our country's past—and this leaves us unable to move forward as a society. When we don't understand what happened in the past, we are unable to learn from what went right and what went wrong in our country's past, and we can't see how prior actions and events continue to affect us today. We need to understand the past to avoid repeating past mistakes and make progress as a society.

In order to move forward as country, we need to make sure that we have opportunities to learn about our past—by prioritizing history in schools, funding museums and historical sites, and making sure that historians have a voice in public life. Learning about diverse accounts of the past helps us understand what went right and wrong in our country's past, which helps our society learn from the past and make progress. And by looking at new evidence of the past as it comes to light, we get a more complete understanding of our past—which can help us do things differently, now and in the future.

By better understanding our past, we can make progress as a society.

### **Justice:**

#### **Understanding the Past Helps Address Past Injustices**

In our society today, we believe in the principle of justice. But currently in the United States, most people don't have a complete understanding of our country's past—and this leaves us unable to reckon with our society's past injustices. When we don't understand what happened in the past, we are unable to see the lasting impact of our society's wrongdoings and how they continue to affect individuals and communities today. We need to understand the past to address our society's mistakes.

In order to reckon with past injustices, we need to make sure that we have opportunities to learn about our past—by prioritizing history in schools, funding museums and historical sites, and making sure that historians have a voice in public life. Learning about diverse accounts of the past helps us understand the wrongs committed in our society, including how and why they happened, who they affected, and how they continue to affect people today. And by looking at new evidence of the past as it comes to light, we get a more complete understanding of our past—which can help us build a more just society, now and in the future.

By better understanding our past, we can make amends for our society's past injustices.

### **Diversity and Inclusion:**

#### **Understanding the Past Helps Us Create a More Inclusive Society**

As a society, we value diversity and making sure everyone is included in public life—regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, or sexual orientation. But currently in the United States, we exclude many communities' voices and stories from our understanding of our past, which makes it hard to recognize and celebrate this diversity. When we don't have a complete understanding of what happened in the past, we are unable to appreciate the lasting

contributions that diverse communities and groups have made and continue to make in our society. We need to understand the past to celebrate our diverse society.

In order to create a more inclusive society, we need to make sure that we have opportunities to learn about our past—by prioritizing history in schools, funding museums and historical sites, and making sure that historians have a voice in public life. Learning about diverse accounts of the past helps us understand the experiences of everyone in society, including people whose identities, cultures, and traditions are often left out of our shared history. And by looking at new evidence of the past as it comes to light, we get a more complete understanding of our past—which can help build a more inclusive society, now and in the future.

By better understanding our past, we can create a more inclusive society.

### **Issue frame conditions:**

#### **Reducing Prejudice:**

##### **Understanding the Past Helps Address Prejudice**

Understanding our country's past helps create a less prejudiced society. By studying the perspectives of diverse communities over time—including different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups—we are able to put ourselves in other people's shoes and understand how they thought, felt, or made decisions. This helps us recognize our common humanity and respect our differences. Having a more complete understanding of our country's past can help us appreciate what we all share as human beings, recognize how we are different, and reduce prejudice and discrimination in our society.

In order to develop our sense of common humanity, we need to make sure that we have opportunities to learn about our past—by prioritizing history in schools, funding museums and historical sites, and making sure that historians have a voice in public life. Learning about diverse accounts of the past helps us acknowledge and respect our differences and

recognize the ties that bind us. And by looking at new evidence of the past as it comes to light, we get a more complete understanding of our past—which can help us appreciate who we are as a diverse society and create belonging for everyone in our society, now and in the future.

By better understanding our past, we can help address prejudice in our society.

#### **Democracy:**

##### **Understanding the Past Helps Create a Stronger Democracy**

Learning about our past matters for our country's democracy. When the public has a complete understanding of our past, they are able to think critically about our country and the decisions we have made over time. This helps create an informed society because decisions about the present should be informed by knowledge of past policies—how they came about, how they have changed over time, and how they have impacted individuals and communities. Having a more complete understanding of our country's past strengthens our democracy and enables people to be engaged as voters and as members of society.

In order to create a strong democracy, we need to make sure that we have opportunities to learn about our past—by prioritizing history in schools, funding museums and historical sites, and making sure that historians have a voice in public life. Learning about diverse accounts of the past helps us make informed decisions as individuals, communities, and as a nation. And by looking at new evidence of the past as it comes to light, we get more complete understanding of our past—which can support everyone's participation in our democracy, now and in the future.

By better understanding our past, we can create a stronger democracy.

## Critical Thinking:

### Understanding the Past Helps Us Think Critically

Understanding the past helps us think critically about the world and our place within it. Studying history requires us to compare, contrast, and evaluate a range of different perspectives of past events. It requires us to think for ourselves about what events, issues, and trends are historically significant and how they connect. And it helps us evaluate how past events continue to have meaning and relevance today. Studying history builds critical thinking skills that expand our worldview and help us in all aspects of our lives.

In order to develop our critical thinking skills, we need to make sure that we have opportunities to learn about our past—by prioritizing history in schools, funding museums and historical sites, and making sure that historians have a voice in public life. Learning about diverse accounts of the past helps us think critically about our society and how it came to be. And learning about history can teach us how to evaluate new evidence of the past as it comes to light, which helps us form a more complete understanding of the past.

By better understanding our past, we can think critically about the world and develop skills that help us in all aspects of our lives.

## Peer-discourse Sessions

After an analysis of both waves of the survey experiment was conducted, FrameWorks researchers retested and refined frames that tested well in PDS over Zoom with 36 participants (six sessions with six participants each) in May 2021. A diverse sample of participants was recruited from across the United States in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, education level, and political party identification.

These two-hour-long sessions included a variety of discussion prompts and activities designed to evaluate how the frames were taken up in social context and their usability during conversations with peers. We tested metaphors, value combinations, and examples.



# Evidence Supporting Recommendations

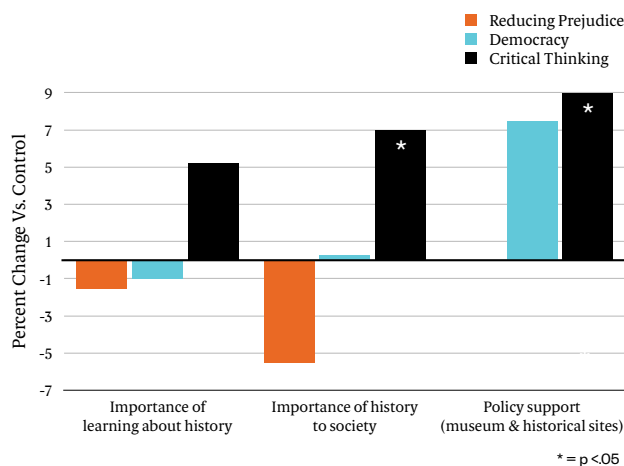
The evidence supporting each of the recommendations in the Strategic Brief is provided below.

## RECOMMENDATION #1

### Talk about critical thinking to shift perceptions about what history involves.

Issue frames establish what a topic is actually “about.” Experts recognize that there are many dimensions to an issue. But in public discourse, one dimension of a topic—also known as an issue frame—is frequently invoked. Framing research shows that foregrounding particular issue frames can dramatically affect public thinking.

To that end, we tested three issue frames designed to talk about history and its value in society in terms of Reducing Prejudice, Democracy, or Critical Thinking. As shown below, the critical thinking issue frame helps people better understand the importance of learning about history, builds appreciation for its importance to individuals and to society, and generates public support for devoting greater resources to the field of history, such as funding museums and historical sites.

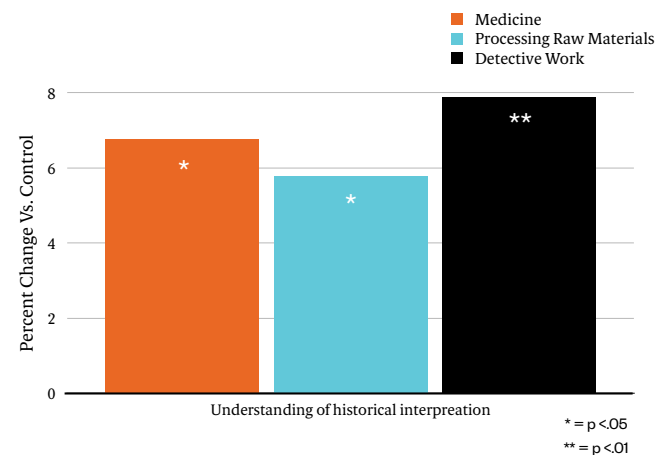


## RECOMMENDATION #2:

### Compare historical interpretation to detective work to deepen understanding of historical practice.

Explanatory metaphors are linguistic devices that help people think and talk about a complex concept in new ways. By comparing an abstract or unfamiliar idea to something concrete and familiar, explanatory metaphors can make information easier to understand—and can have a particular power to change the way a topic is understood.

We tested four explanatory metaphors to explain what historical interpretation entails: two of which are not currently used in the field (a Drawing Maps metaphor and a Processing Raw Materials metaphor) and two of which are currently used by historians, public historians, and communicators to some extent (a Detective Work metaphor and a Medicine metaphor). As shown in Figure 2, the detective work metaphor was effective in building people’s understanding of what historical interpretation entails.

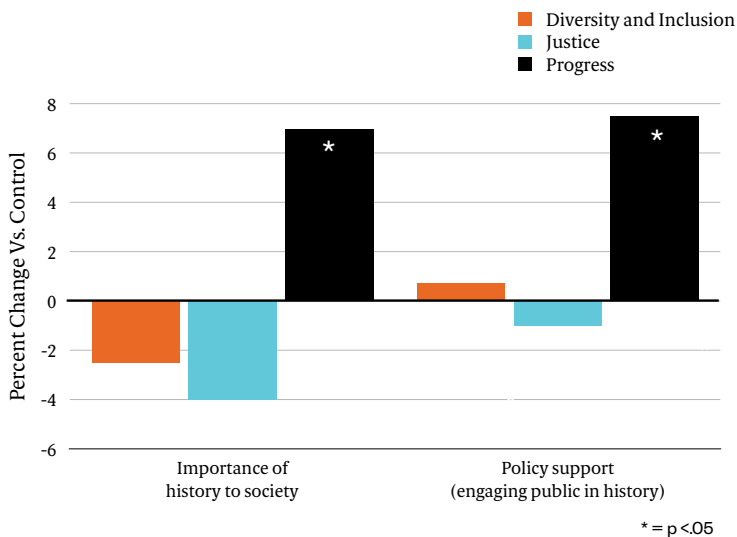


## RECOMMENDATION #3

## Emphasize how history helps us make progress toward a just world to increase the recognition of history's importance.

Values are organizing principles that people use to evaluate social issues and make decisions. When used as frames, values help people understand what's at stake about an issue and why they should support it. We tested three values frames to help explain why history is important to society: Progress, Justice, and Diversity and Inclusion. As shown below, the progress value was effective in building people's sense that history is important to society and building support for solutions to engage the public in history (e.g., funding museums and historical sites and scholarships to study history). It was also shown to have bipartisan support among both Democrats and Republicans.

It is important to note that while the justice value didn't perform as well in the survey experiment, in the peer-discourse sessions we found that it helped ground and explain the end goal of progress and did not lead to polarized thinking based on political party affiliation. Without an explanation of the end goal of progress, people struggled to understand exactly what societal progress meant or why they should support it. Based on these combined quantitative and qualitative data, we recommend that communicators pair the progress value with the justice value to explain how history helps us make progress toward a just world.



## RECOMMENDATION #4

## Use concrete, location-specific, solutions-focused examples to build support for inclusive history.

In PDS, frames are tested in a group setting to evaluate how they are taken up in social discourse. Analyzing how frames are understood and used in a group is a necessary step to refine tools that have tested well in one-on-one qualitative research and survey experiments.

We tested both problem-focused and solutions-focused messages about the need to build support for inclusive history in peer-discourse sessions, and found that participants were more likely to understand the importance and possibility of learning about an inclusive history of the United States when the messages focused on a concrete solution (i.e., a museum that showcases the history of Japanese internment) rather than a problem (i.e., the lack of substantial discussion about Japanese internment in history textbooks). Moreover, we found that participants were able to use the solutions-focused examples to think of other, location-specific examples of museums and historical sites in their own localities. A qualitative analysis of PDS revealed that concrete, location-specific, and solutions-focused examples help build people's support for an inclusive history of the United States and help overcome people's fatalism about whether this is possible.



# Making History Matter: Research Methods and Data Appendix

The FrameWorks Institute, in partnership  
with the American Association for State  
and Local History.

Supported by  
**The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**

Design by  
**Constructive**

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the FrameWorks Institute.

Please follow standard APA rules for citation,  
with the FrameWorks Institute as publisher.

Miller, T., Volmert, A., L'Hôte, E., Volmert, A., Aassar, M., Callen, A. (2022). Making History Matter: From Abstract Truth to Critical Engagement: A FrameWorks Strategic Brief. FrameWorks Institute.

© FrameWorks Institute 2022