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INVESTIGATING THE HYSTERIA AROUND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Invited Guest Editor
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Investigating the Hysteria Around Critical Race Theory

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Hysteria, Hypermania, & Hullabaloo: How White Emotionalities Manufactures Fear of Critical Race Theory & Teaching

Cheryl E. Matias

Abstract

*From a global pandemic that killed 6.5 million people to worldwide awareness of police brutality leading to the systematic murders of Black people, the world today has set a new precedent in what constitutes fear. Plainly, fear is not always some sentimental whim one conjures up against a fantastical boogeyman; instead, fear in today's sense is tantamount to life and death themselves. Therefore, one can understand how absurd it is to hear that the nation has become quickly obsessed about the fear of a potential new "threat:" not monkeypox or nuclear war, not white supremacist marches or the Ukrainian war, but the big, "bad," CRT. That critical race theory (CRT) is the boogeyman, moreover the big bad wolf, lurking behind K-12 classrooms waiting to huff and puff at the doors of K-12 schools, simply to blow down their very existence is *ridonkulous*.¹ This series points out how we are being swayed by ridiculousness and how we can think more critically and rationally regarding CRT, antiracism, and racially just education.*

Keywords: anti-CRT ban, teachers, race, whiteness, teacher education

Manufacturing Fear

From a global pandemic that has killed 6.5 million people to worldwide awareness of police brutality leading to the systematic murders of Black people, the world today has set a new precedent in what constitutes fear. Plainly, fear is not always some sentimental whim one conjures up against a fantastical boogeyman; instead, fear in today's sense is tantamount to life and death themselves. Therefore, one can understand how absurd it is to hear that the nation has become quickly obsessed about the fear of a potential new "threat:" not monkeypox or nuclear war, not white supremacist marches or the Ukrainian war, but the big, "bad," CRT. That critical race theory (CRT) is the boogeyman, moreover the big bad wolf, lurking behind K-12 classrooms waiting to huff and puff at the doors of K-12 schools, simply to blow down their very existence is *ridonkulous*. And before anyone turns away from this publication simply because they are too ashamed that they too were caught up in the sensation to fear that which they know not of, then let me spell out this *ridonkulousness*.

First, anyone who has actually studied CRT knows that it is an analytic tool used in graduate schools like legal studies and education to theoretically and empirically examine how race,

1. According to Urban Dictionary, *ridonkulous* is "Used when an event or action is way beyond 'ridiculous.' Extremely unbelievable." <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=ridonkulous>

racism, and white supremacy impact laws, policies, and practices in society and schools (see Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dixson & Rousseau Anderson, 2018; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Taylor et al., 2009). Regardless of whether it is rooted in racial theory (see Cabrera, 2018), CRT has spread in various sub disciplines to 1) help professionals understand the effect of race on all people 2) hold professionals accountable for how they engage in their respective professions, especially reflecting on whether those engagements truly honor the humanity of us all. For example, Romero et al. (2009) used CRT in their research to help educators understand how Latinx students experience schooling, so that educators can check their biases and improve the educational attainment for Latinx students. Ammann et al (2017), employed CRT in her study to illustrate the intersections between disability studies and race, thus helping educators identify the racial implications in their pedagogies around students with disabilities whilst improving teaching practices that better support students with special needs. Solórzano & Ornela (2002) used CRT in their analysis to critically examine advanced placement classes and how they might have racial implications that ultimately harm students of color. By doing so, educators are more informed about the unconscious racial biases that may leave students of color, as CRT founder so offered, “at the bottom of the well” (Bell, 1992). Clearly, CRT is NOT THE BIG BAD WOLF others claim it to be. Unlike CRT’s haters who have probably never read any book on CRT by critical race theorists themselves, those who actually employ and understand CRT *and* identify themselves as critical race theorists realize how CRT is helping, not harming, our society. In a world where accountability is key, CRT keeps professionals accountable for their thoughts, actions, and biases so that society can move forward in more humanizing ways. Therefore, frankly speaking, if school age children are indeed engaging in IRB-approved empirical or theoretical research that deconstructs the racial ramifications within court cases, legal or educational policies, pedagogical practices, and/or larger systemic change then, by all means, I, as a former K-12 teacher in both Los Angeles Unified School District and New York Department of Education, am impressed. WOW! Good for them. In fact, if CRT is being taught in K-12 schools, then why did I, now a full professor, have to pay back a hefty graduate school loan to UCLA to learn it? Half-jokingly, I, myself, would like to know exactly what K-12 schools are teaching CRT so that I can enroll there too. Alas, for the God-giveth time, CRT is NOT taught in K-12 schools, but its intent for antiracism, racial justice, and humanizing ALL human beings may be embedded in K-12 schooling practices and curricula and, if that is so, is that a bad thing? In fact, I question an educator’s morals if something like CRT—that seeks to help students who are most vulnerable academically achieve—is seen as bad. Simply put, if you don’t want to help *all* students why are you in the classroom in the first place?

Second, there have been a lot of misrepresentations of what CRT is and what it is not. One newspaper headlines how CRT is abusing students (see Stabile, 2021) another claims CRT is dangerous (see Blackburn, 2021). Butcher and Gonzales (2020) go as far to say it teaches intolerance and hate. None of these claims are true. The truth is, as posited by Matias and Allen (2016), that CRT, unlike its naysayers posit, is about LOVE not hate. They write, “CRT is a loving praxis that centers the voices of those most hurt by racism: people of color” (p. 3). Further, they argue that CRT is about love for whites as well because:

CRT, as curriculum, can reveal to them [whites] how they are taught a false love for whiteness, a “love” largely built upon unjust material privileges and distorted ideological rationalizations (Allen, 2009; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996). Whiteness is posed as a problem to

white students, which, if combined with literature from fields like critical whiteness studies, can lead them to a better understanding of their problematic relationships with racialized Others (Allen, 2004; Leonardo, 2009). This type of curriculum can help white students release themselves from a limiting sense of self and realize a more humanizing love by working in alliance with people of color to undo structural racism and create humanization for all (Matias & Allen, 2016, p. 3).

Clearly, CRT is about reaching deep into the biases we hold within our hearts, and pushing us to investigate them in ways that will expand our way of knowing, even if it is a difficult task to do so. In fact, when it comes to abuse, whiteness left intact, especially in education, indeed abuses students of color (see Matias, 2016a) not the other way around where white students who already get eurocentric curriculum that affirms their white eurocentric identities. I wrote, “Just as teaching white children how to be white and act white is racially abusive (Thandeka, 1999), so too is institutionally supporting Whiteness through dispelling ideas of benevolent saviority, adopting false racially coded terminologies, and denying an understanding of the white self by deflecting focus only to ‘the Other’” (p. 3). Therefore, ignoring how whiteness operates in classrooms, and in society, leaves the cycle of racial abuse alive. That is where the abuse resides.

White Emotionalities as Culprit

The question then becomes why? Why is it that one fears something whilst not knowing what it truly means and, regardless of that, still recklessly jumps onto the bandwagon? It is as if these individuals have lost all mental faculty and rational thought needed to delineate and discern fact from fiction and, instead opt for an irrational, emotional knee jerk reaction that recklessly allows sheep to lead. Simply put, what is compelling people to let go of their rationality in ways that compel them to act as nothing more than a horny teenager, acting on impulse alone? The culprit is *white emotionalities* (see Matias, 2016b).

As described in *Feeling White* (Matias, 2016b), white emotions are the surface leveled emotional reactions commonly described as white guilt (Steele, 1990), whitelash/defensiveness (Bonilla-Silva, 2020; Kellner, 2017), unsubstantiated fear (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014), white rage (Anderson, 2016), or white ethnic shame (Thandeka, 2007) whereas white emotionalities (see, Matias, 2021) are the deeper psychoanalytic reasons that undergird those surface leveled emotional defense mechanisms. Meaning, the emotionalities of whiteness are the core human emotions and are root causes for manifestations of defense mechanisms; emotional defense mechanisms that surface up in ways that seek to protect and keep those deep-seated core values hidden.

Take for example a monogamous couple who just realized one of the partners was unfaithful, engaging in infidelity. The surface leveled reaction may be anger, though that emotion is real, it is not the underlying emotion in this case. Instead, it can be an emotional defense mechanism that, when fixated solely on anger alone, detracts from deeper issues like the fear of human abandonment. Obviously, issues like infidelity in a monogamous relationship are not just about anger and betrayal. Instead, infidelity hurts deeply because the trust one initially had in walking through life together with this other person has been compromised. Now, their entire sense of security is put into question. Plainly, infidelity is not only about anger. Rather, it is also about a human core value of extreme loss and sense of abandonment from a once trusted person, and this realization can trigger an angry response. Inasmuch as infidelity can induce complex emotions, so too do white emotions.

To better understand white emotions we must attend to both the surface level expressed emotions alongside the deeper emotions rooted in the core of humanity that undergird them. So, for CRT, it's not just about identifying that one is afraid of or angry at CRT, despite not having read one book on the topic, more so than understanding what is the core human value which makes one so afraid of CRT. This is the beginning of self-realizing inquiries that dig deep at the human core; a process that ultimately requires the self-work that many are afraid or refuse to do. For example, consider the self-investigative work one must do to free their minds, and in this case, hearts from racialized emotions (see Bonilla-Silva, 2019; Matias, 2016b). Indeed, emotions about race are socialized because for naysayers of race who claim they do not see race, they show an awful lot of emotions when discussing race. Yet when talking about unicorns—another item naysayers claim to not see—those same emotional reactions are not expressed as they are with race. So, to unlearn socialized emotions about race, otherwise racialized emotions, especially with regards to white emotions, anti-CRTers have a lot to consider. For example, do anti-CRTers, many of whom are racially identified as white, feel as if they will lose the following:

1. Their identity. If that is so, then what identity do they fear to lose? White identity? American identity? Why this sense of loss? Does one feel they lose who they are when learning a new task, activity, or skill like skiing? Then why race? Perhaps, could being white be something they feel they possess?
2. Their humanity. Do these individuals believe there's a conflict in being human when one learns about racism? Why is that? Does learning about another sports team make a sports fanatic love their favorite team less? Or perhaps has adoption of whiteness ideology developed a skewed sense of white identity that is now feeling threatened because the truth sometimes hurts?
3. Their path. What presumed predestined path were these individuals on, which then causes great strife to consider paths anew? How does one know that path to be true? What if it is not a true path? How does learning about others thwart one's path? Why does one feel compelled to stay on one path? Why is one afraid to explore new paths?

These investigative inquiries into one's understanding of their human core of existence are important because "if humanity is to really understand why we feel the way we feel...it is imperative that we excavate the remnants of our emotionalities lest we succumb to a strictly socialized state of emotion" (Matias, 2016b, p. 6).

Another noteworthy aspect of white emotionalities is that despite the regular appearance of white emotions in discussions of race or racism, like national discussions of CRT, what people do not realize is 1) *why* they so regularly show up *and* 2) how these emotions can be weaponized to operationally shut down progress towards racial equity. First, to be clear, as social scientists, our main task is to understand social patterns and find ways to intellectually understand these patterns. Be it as it may, the almost predictable display of white emotions surrounding topics of race and racism are essentially an emotional pattern that is in need of intellectual understanding. Meaning, white emotions, undergirded by white emotionalities, are themselves patterns because they systematically pop up every time the fragile sensibilities of whiteness is challenged (see Di-Angelo, 2018). Ignoring this pattern or even dismissing the regular displays of white emotions provides race scholars, antiracist, racially just educators, and racial equity minded individuals with no understanding as to how to be effective in delivering messages about racial justice. Instead, this

type of antiracism will go in one ear and out the other, rendering the work behind antiracism useless. As such, it behooves us, racially just educational scholars, to understand how to more effectively teach a message of racial humanity even if it means understanding the complex dynamics of white emotions and its hirsute cousin, white emotionalities.

Second, white emotions are not simply emotions; they carry racial power. Suffice it to say that “if white supremacy, upheld by the ideological beliefs in whiteness, continues to maintain a racial power structure, then the emotions subjected to such a structure will also be impacted by it” (Matias, 2016b, p. 5). To illustrate, consider the belief of white racial purity. Though there are individuals who still believe in white racial superiority, the belief that whites are pure was more commonplace in yesteryear. This widespread belief led to emotional responses like fear of Black people which set the basis for the passing of anti-miscegenation laws; sadly a similar suit to anti-CRT bans. During the first half of the twentieth century 30 of the then 48 states passed and enforced anti-miscegenation laws barring interracial marriage between whites and Blacks, Mexicans, and even men from the Malay race. Beyond marriage, this emotional sentiment (fear of racial Other) also undergirded large scale racial segregation in forms of racial covenants and redlining. Hence, white emotions *have* white racial power and, overlooking their substantive power, renders us at the mercy of them. One has only to look into the murder of 14-year old African American boy, Emmett Louis Till, who was wrongly accused of sexually harassing a white woman. Despite later confessing she lied under oath, Carolyn Bryant’s white woman’s tears were powerful enough to have her then husband, Roy Bryant, and his half-brother, J. W. Miley, kidnap, torture, and murder the child. But white emotions have even more power. Instead of convicting the white men for murder or indicting Carolyn later for false reports, these emotions were substantive enough that all three individuals lived a long life, free from the legal responsibility of their murderous actions. This is no different than how white woman, Amanda Cooper, weaponized her white emotions in response to an African American man’s request to leash her dog, per Central Park’s Ramble regulations. Instead of abiding by the park regulations, Cooper is videotaped manipulating her emotions from anger to false fear in a 911 call, hoping that her emotions would be enough to get an African American man arrested by police. Simply put, white emotions and the emotionalities that undergird them are dangerous because when they surface they engage in enactments that ultimately harm Black, Indigenous, People of Color period. And, when anti-CRTers engage in emotional vitriol of a theory that is, by virtue, conceptualized to engage in equitable treatment of people of color, one cannot help but fear white emotional retribution, precisely because there is a history of it wreaking havoc. Per DiAngelo & Sensoy (2014), the sentimentalized fear of CRT is *not* equivalent to the tangible fear people of color face when white emotions overpower their humanity. For all that needs to happen to substantiate the maltreatment of people of color is white people’s emotional fear of something they have no historical proof to be fearful of.

Conclusion

The BIG BAD CRT is NOT so BIG and BAD inasmuch as white emotionalities are. This fixation on one’s fear or hatred for CRT is only but a surface leveled expression of deeper issues of one’s core sense of self. Meaning, these individuals are so insecure about their own identity that they huff and puff when hearing that other people are very secure, even proud, of their identities. For example, their identity has been so sadly intertwined with delusions of whiteness such that any discussion of multiculturalism leaves them feeling abandoned. To be clear, the thought of divorcing from the delusional marriage between whiteness and identity *is* the real fear. Essentially, who

am I if I cannot be white? Alas, anti-CRTers must, like in the Christian sense, have a come to Jesus moment whereby they deeply investigate why they so fear new paths, new identities, new histories, and new people. Unless they do that they will, as sheep do, irrationally follow a path that takes them farther away from humanity and closer to a life of eternal fear.

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Critical Race Theory in Schools? The Struggle for a More Inclusive Curriculum

Transcript from a 2021 Public Seminar on Anti-CRT bans

Roland Sintos Coloma, Willie Brewster, Annette Christiansen, Mark P. Fancher, Cleveland Hayes, Lamar Johnson, Cheryl E. Matias, Don Wotruba, Melissa Baker, Nancy Campbell, Beth Kubitskey, & Anne R. Tapp¹

Abstract

This article is an edited transcription of a groundbreaking multi-sector presentation on “Critical Race Theory in Schools?” by a prominent panel of PK-12 school educators, education organization leaders, legal advocate, teacher educators, and academic researchers. The presentation took place virtually as a public seminar in response to legislative bills in Michigan and other states that prohibit the teaching of critical race theory in schools and to the ensuing questions and concerns raised by many constituents in the PK-12 school and teacher education arenas. Over 200 individuals from Michigan, across the country, and even internationally registered, drawn to the webinar’s goals of dispelling misinformation and providing facts and perspectives for meaningful discussions on the

1. The public seminar was held on October 27, 2021. The organizers were Roland Sintos Coloma, Beth Kubitskey, Anne R. Tapp, and Melissa Baker. Coloma is a professor of Teacher Education at Wayne State University and the webinar moderator. Kubitskey is professor and dean of the School of Education and Human Services at the University of Michigan - Flint, and is president of the Michigan Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Tapp is a professor of Teacher Education at Saginaw Valley State University, and was recently elected to the Board of Directors of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Baker is the executive director of the Metropolitan Detroit Bureau of School Studies and a former superintendent of South Lyon Community Schools. The webinar was sponsored by the Michigan Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the Metropolitan Detroit Bureau of School Studies.

The expert panel consisted of Michigan’s leaders in various fields of education and advocacy as well as nationally renowned scholars and researchers of race and education—Willie Brewster, Annette Christiansen, Mark P. Fancher, Cleveland Hayes, Lamar Johnson, Cheryl E. Matias, and Don Wotruba. Brewster is the principal of Brenda Scott Academy in Detroit Public Schools Community District and a doctoral student in the Urban Education Leaders program at Teachers College, Columbia University. Christiansen is a UniServ Consultant and Professional Issues Organizer at the Michigan Education Association and a former high school English teacher in Utica Community Schools. Fancher is the staff attorney for the Racial Justice Project of the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan. Hayes is professor and associate dean of Academic Affairs in the School of Education at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis and a former president of the Critical Race Studies in Education Association. Johnson is associate professor of Language and Literacy for Linguistic and Racial Diversity in the Department of English at Michigan State University. Matias is professor and director of Secondary Teacher Education at the University of Kentucky. Wotruba is the executive director of the Michigan Association of School Boards and a former Board of Trustees member of Eaton Intermediate School District.

The webinar’s welcome and closing remarks were provided by Anne R. Tapp and Nancy Campbell. Campbell is the associate executive director of the Metropolitan Detroit Bureau of School Studies and a former superintendent of Romeo Community Schools. Much appreciation to Sarah Bennett and Sapna Thwaite of the University of Michigan - Flint for providing crucial technical and communication support.

pursuit of more inclusive and justice-oriented curriculum, teaching, and learning in schools. Given the significance, urgency, and controversy over this subject, we offer this manuscript not only as an important documentation of the historic discussion among distinguished experts, but also as a much-needed resource for truth-telling against misinformation and disinformation.

Keywords: *critical race theory, schools, teachers, administrators, school boards, teacher education, Michigan*

Roland Sintos Coloma

“Critical race theory” has become a symbol of what has been perceived as what’s wrong and what’s possible in our curriculum and education system. On the one hand, it has been construed as divisive and anti-American; on the other hand, it facilitates a necessary reckoning with our country’s history of systemic racism and its legacies and ongoing manifestations (Goldberg, 2021; Gross, 2021; López et al., 2021; Lynn & Dixson, 2022; Sawchuk, 2021).

Since Spring 2021, 26 states—including Michigan—have introduced legislation to ban certain types of curriculum related to critical race theory, the 1619 Project, race and racism, and other diversity concepts and practices that are deemed stereotyping or scapegoating (African American Policy Forum, n.d.; López et al., 2021). At the federal level, in September 2020, former President Trump issued Executive Order 13950 that utilized federal funding as a tool to not promote certain categories that it considered as “divisive concepts” as well as race or sex “stereotyping” and “scapegoating” (Kim, 2021). In January 2021, President Biden rescinded that order. At the level of state and local boards of education, many are addressing similar calls to ban certain types of curriculum. At the August 2021 meeting of Michigan’s State Board of Education, state superintendent Michael Rice remarked:

Educators have not just the right but the responsibility to teach the breadth of our history, and this history includes race and racism...To choose to ignore race and racism in our teaching is to efface or erase history, implicitly or explicitly, and to shortchange our children, who deserve to learn the full breadth and complexity of our extraordinary history. (Rice, 2021)²

It is within these broader national, state, and local contexts and with our commitment to democracy, justice, academic freedom, and truth-telling that we offer this public webinar, especially to constituents that are directly and mostly impacted—to PK-12 school teachers, administrators, school board members, students, parents and guardians, as well as teacher educators in colleges and universities and those aspiring to become teachers. We have over 200 individuals who have registered for this event from Michigan, across the country, and even internationally.

2. On January 11, 2022, Michigan’s State Board of Education adopted a “Resolution on Teaching Comprehensive History,” indicating that the Board “firmly opposes Senate Bill 460 and House Bill 5097 for their chilling effect on local teachers and, in so doing, supports local school districts and local teachers in their professional and statutory responsibility to determine the most appropriate local curricula to effectively teach to local public school children Michigan’s K-12 Standards for Social Studies” (Michigan State Board of Education, 2022).

With the leadership of the Michigan Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (MACTE) and the Metropolitan Detroit Bureau of School Studies (Metro Bureau), we envision this webinar to raise public awareness, to dispel misinformation, and to provide accurate details about critical race theory and other frameworks and approaches that promote and advance a more inclusive, complex, and just curriculum.

Anne R. Tapp

The Michigan Association of Colleges for Teacher Education understands the importance of this event and work in the areas of equity, justice, censorship, and academic freedom. It's a priority for us. We are an organization that exists to promote the learning of all PK-12 students through the promotion of high-quality preparation and continuing education for all school personnel. We represent the institutional interests of collegiate-based teacher education. Our parent organization, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, is producing a Racial and Social Justice Resource Hub (AACTE, n.d.) for our members and by our members that will be useful for all of us. We have an impressive line-up of panelists, including our moderator who brought this idea to our MACTE team and secured our panelists. We hope you will think deeply with us.

Roland Sintos Coloma

In Michigan, there are two legislative bills directed toward critical race theory and any form of “race or gender stereotyping”: Senate Bill 460 and House Bill 5097.

Senate Bill 460 would prohibit public schools to teach “critical race theory, the 1619 project, or any of the following theories:

- That any race is inherently superior or inferior to any other race.
- That the United States is a fundamentally racist country.
- That the Declaration of Independence or the US Constitution are fundamentally racist documents.
- That an individual's moral character or worth is determined by his or her race.
That an individual, by virtue of his or her race, is inherently racist or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously.” (S.B. 460, 2021)

In this bill, critical race theory is defined as “anti-American and racist theories, reading guides, lesson plans, activities, guided discussions, and other resources that promote that the United States is a fundamentally racist document, and that certain races are fundamentally oppressive or oppressed” (S.B. 460, 2021). It also defines the 1619 Project “as an initiative of *The New York Times* that attempts to reframe American history by regarding 1619 as America's birth year” (S.B. 460, 2021).

On October 26, 2021, S.B. 460 was approved by Michigan's Senate Education and Career Readiness Committee with a 4 -1 vote and will advance to the full Senate for consideration. If this bill were to pass, the State Department of Education in Michigan would be required to annually verify that school districts are not teaching CRT and the 1619 Project, and those districts found in

violation would lose 5% of their total funds under the State School Aid Act. Additionally, the department would be required to submit an annual report to the House and Senate education committees detailing districts that are not in compliance with the bill.

House Bill 5097 does not mention critical race theory explicitly, but it would prohibit the state's core academic curriculum and content standards to include "any form of race or gender stereotyping or anything that could be understood as implicit race or gender stereotyping" (H.B. 5097, 2021). In this bill:

"Race or gender stereotyping" means a set of statements, beliefs, or ideas that conform wholly or in part with the following general or particular statements:

- That all individuals comprising a racial or ethnic group or gender hold a collective quality or belief.
- That individuals act in certain ways or hold certain opinions because of their race or gender.
- That individuals are born racist or sexist by accident of their race or gender.
- That individuals bear collective guilt for historical wrongs committed by their race or gender.
- That race or gender is a better predictor of outcome than character, work ethic, or skills.
- That cultural norms or practices of a racial or ethnic group or gender are flawed and must be eliminated or changed to conform with those of another racial or ethnic group or gender.
- That racism is inherent in individuals from a particular race or ethnic group or that sexism is inherent in individuals from a particular gender.
- That a racial or ethnic group or gender is in need of deconstruction, elimination, or criticism.
- That the actions of individuals serve as an indictment against the race or gender of those individuals." (H.B. 5097, 2021)

On September 28, 2021, Michigan's House Education Committee passed House Bill 5097 along party lines without any discussion from committee members, and was referred to a second reading.

In light of these House and Senate bills in Michigan and the ensuing debates and controversy over critical race theory in schools across the country, I have asked the webinar speakers to address any of the following questions: What is critical race theory (CRT)? And what it is not? How could CRT impact how we see and do "schooling"? What are the legislative bills about CRT in schools about? What is included and excluded in the bills' language about CRT in schools? What has been the impact of these bills to PK-12 school curriculum and to diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racist work in schools? How would you like to see race, racism, and anti-racism addressed in PK-12 schools? What guidance would you give to PK-12 teachers, administrators, school board members, and staff when asked about inclusive curriculums in schools? What guidance would you give to parents, neighbors, and other community members? What guidance would you give to those in teacher education programs?

The speakers will present in the following order, and will address their topics in relation to critical race theory in schools: Cleveland Hayes (Indiana University Purdue University Indianap-

olis), overview of critical race theory and CRT in education; Mark Fancher (American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan), implications for racial justice in schools and communities; Don Wotruba (Michigan Association of School Boards), implications for school boards, policies, and governance; Willie Brewster (Detroit Public Schools Community District), for PK-12 school administrators; Annette Christiansen (Michigan Education Association), for PK-12 school teachers; Lamar Johnson (Michigan State University), implications for curriculum and aspiring teachers; and Cheryl Matias (University of Kentucky), guidance for teacher educators.

Cleveland Hayes

I will start off our conversation with some understanding of what critical race theory in education broadly looks like and what it is not. Drawing from the work of Adrienne Dixon (2021), critical race theory as a theoretical framework originated in the legal scholarship in the 1980s. The founding CRT scholars were dissatisfied with the anti-discrimination laws and legal scholarship that informed it because it did not adequately address race and racism and relied too heavily on incremental change. CRT was introduced to the field of education in the 1990s to address similar dissatisfaction with research in education. CRT scholars in education believed that it did not fully account for racism in education spaces. Moreover, they felt that multicultural education had become coopted and no longer had the potential to adequately address inequities within education.

Critical race theory is not training people to be anti-racist. It is not static or prepackaged curriculum that is to be sold to PK-12 schools and universities. It is not focused on making White people feel guilty, I cannot stress this enough. It is not Black, Asian, Latino/a/x or Chicano/a/x, or Indigenous supremacy. It is also not culturally responsive teaching or culturally relevant pedagogy. CRT, however, helps us think more carefully about how policies and practices create barriers that prevent equitable participation and success in educational enterprises. It is not taught in PK-12 schools as curriculum formally. If teachers had courses where instructors utilize CRT texts, then they may have a broader understanding of race, racism, and inequity compared to teachers who have not (Dixon, 2021). In that way, CRT may inform teachers' pedagogy and curriculum.

What we've known in the last several months is we have a lot of disinformation and misinformation. Disinformation is false information deliberately and often covertly spread through rumors, while misinformation is incorrect or misleading information. I think this argument around critical race theory as misinformation is just flat out wrong. It's misleading to think that it's creating a divided society based upon some imaginary bogey person. Historically, in the United States, we've had to create a monster per se and, in this particular instance, it is critical race theory. Some lies and untruths about critical race theory: CRT equals DEI or diversity, equity, and inclusion training; DEI efforts make White students feel bad; discussions of race are bad and divisive; and systematic racism does not exist. These are lies and untruths. And this is not about individuals; rather, it's about systems and the way systems keep certain people from moving in and out.

D-L Stewart (n.d.) asks, "What do diversity and equity mean?" Diversity asks, "Who's in the room?" Inclusion asks, "Has everyone been heard?" Diversity asks, "How many more of (pick any marginalized identity) group have we had this year? People often think that if you invite one person of color or somebody from a marginalized group, then you're being inclusive. But then inclusion also asks, "Is the environment safe for everyone to feel like they belong?" Moreover, D-L Stewart provides theoretical and academic tenets that drive CRT, but I broke them down in much more simplistic terms. The first tenet is that racism exists throughout American life. Teaching slavery or Jim Crow is not divisive; they are facts and based on race. Owning certain people and

keeping certain people disenfranchised—that's not divisive; that's not making anyone feel bad; those are facts. Next, the framework believes that all Americans do not have the same opportunities and access to achieve. You can look at it from historical perspective, and again these are not made up. Those are facts. Today's gaps in economic and social success are results of racism. Racism may not be the only factor, but it's never *not* a factor. For instance, for poor people of color, you have to think about the racist structures that are keeping them in those spaces. Finally, how can teachers use the experiences of their students and bring them into the classroom to develop pedagogy that will enable them to move in certain spaces and create the educational success that education is supposed to do?

If CRT were taught in schools, how might we use this framework to analyze the history and legacy of the G.I. Bill (Servicemen's Readjustment Act)? I can recall when Drew Brees was upset about the NFL (National Football League) players kneeling because his grandfather was a World War II veteran. Well, so was mine. When Brees' grandfather came back, the G.I. Bill and V.A. (Veterans Affairs) loan helped vets buy a home. My grandfather came back to a segregated Mississippi, to a segregated South, and did not have the opportunity to get a V.A. loan and was denied the G.I. bill to further his education. Perhaps if he had those opportunities, he could have finished this degree. In closing, if CRT was actually being taught in schools maybe we would have better education outcomes for children especially BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) children.

Mark Fancher

Let me start by saying that this whole controversy is a pile of silliness. Anytime anything happens in America, you want to understand why it's happening first, and you have to understand what's on White people's minds. What we are witnessing is an exercise of a long-standing process of denial, suppressing any facts which reveal the truth about America. The fact is that America is built on a foundation of blood, death, genocide, and slavery (Churchill, 1997; Williams, 1944). The territory was stolen from Indigenous populations. It was built up by the forced labor of Africans who were kidnapped from the continent. And those facts are things that White people do not want to confront and do not want to comprehend because it accounts in large part for the privileges that they continue to enjoy to this day. The fact is that White workers, in particular, are duped and they don't understand that they've been manipulated historically by a small group of people who intended not only to exclude enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples, but to exclude them as well (Smith & Tokaji, n.d.).

The country was established by a small group of elite White men. Early on in the Constitution, it was established that only this small group would be able to participate in the political process (Smith & Tokaji, n.d.). Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution specifies that to ensure the members of this small group from the South, which was largely agrarian and sparsely populated by White people, would have equitable representation in Congress, they were allowed to count their enslaved labor as three-fifths of a human being (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021). In the South, only a small group was able to afford to own slaves. The small elite group had to pay, in today's money, as much as \$10,000 to \$30,000 for one person, and only a small group could do that. So the task for the small elite group was to ensure that the vast majority of White people and White workers in the South, in particular, who lived lives that qualitatively were only slightly better than those of enslaved Africans, would never make common cause with these oppressed people, with these enslaved people.

White elites drove a wedge between them, and they did this through white nationalism by persuading White workers that they had more affinity and greater political allegiance with those who were members of the elite group (Higginbotham, 1978; Wilkerson, 2020). While White workers were not living lives that were qualitatively the same as the elite, they at least have prospects for upward mobility, and were given a certain amount of respect that was not extended to enslaved Africans. This meant everything to them, and they fought valiantly, diligently, and vigilantly in order to protect the status that they have, which was only slightly above that of enslaved Africans. It was also necessary to keep control of a rebellious African population in the plantations. White elites hired overseers from this White working-class group in order to play that role to suppress black rage (Coates, 2016). When it was necessary to fight Indigenous peoples who were waging war against this new country, they enlisted White workers to become members of cavalry units that would ride out and go to war against them (Adams, 2009). Historically, White workers understood that they were a step above enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples.

But during Reconstruction, everything changed. Literacy rates among formerly enslaved people shot up at a rate unseen in any other population in the world (Span, 2014). Africans were able to find their way into state legislatures and, in the case of South Carolina, to take it over (Richardson, 2018). There were African Americans who were in the U.S. Congress, in the House of Representatives and the Senate; there was a Black lieutenant governor. There were Black enterprises that were springing up all over the place (Higginbotham, 1996; Umoh & Garrett, 2020). This formerly enslaved group found itself economically, politically, and otherwise above many of the White workers, and the resentment and jealousy were intense. During the Reconstruction period, the rise of militant white nationalism became manifest in the Ku Klux Klan and other White terrorist groups (Higginbotham, 1996). This tradition of ensuring that, if necessary, you suppress Black populations by force, is something that has been with us from the very beginning. Demagogues have exploited this dynamic politically into the 20th and 21st centuries. With President Trump, the “insurrection” on January 6, 2021 is a manifestation of what we saw back during Reconstruction. There’s intense fear of what’s happening with these populations of color who seem to be taking something that was promised not only by the Constitution, but by the US Supreme Court in the *Dred Scott* (1857) opinion and the *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823) with respect to Indigenous peoples.

And so, when you see critical race theory, it sounds scary, terrifying, and intimidating. It’s been used by demagogues to perpetuate a dynamic which has been present in our history, and to frighten people into mobilizing politically in ways that will support the demagogues and their agenda. They don’t have a clue as to what critical race theory means. They talk endlessly about it and have no idea what they’re talking about. All they know is that it is intended to do two things: (1) to raise the profile and the educational level and militancy of students of color; and (2) to tell certain historical truths which make them very uncomfortable. Hence, the agenda is to suppress it by any means necessary. That’s what we’re witnessing and observing.

The victims of this situation are not just White children who are deprived of the opportunity to learn the truth about this country and to learn the truth about themselves, but also children of color who are immersed in a sea of white nationalist culture, internalize these ideas, develop inferiority complexes, and begin to think negatively about themselves. To resolve the racial conflicts and tensions which exist in this country, those facts must be confronted squarely. We must understand that this white fragility, these white fears of losing “their country,” cannot stand in the way of historical truth, which is necessary to confront, to grapple with, and eventually to create paths

forward in order to develop the type of community, country, and society that most people envision when they read the noble words in the Founding Fathers' documents.

Don Wotruba

Speaking from our membership standpoint, we have seen as a country, not only in Michigan, school boards becoming the battleground for conversations on CRT and other issues (Bittle, 2021). In the past six months, the positive directions that many boards have been taking over the last couple of years, maybe over the last five years, depending on where you live, in the conversations around race are now being chilled by the protests and hostility shown to board members. I think that is our biggest risk in this current conversation related to CRT. We are watching districts where this conversation comes up, and not only are we seeing citizens from communities come out to board meetings, but also people that actually don't live in these communities show up and even travel across the state to give their opinions on critical race theory, even though they don't have any knowledge of what's going on in that space.

Where I think the large detriment is, many parents and citizens that actually live within the district or are served by the district are being co-opted in this messaging. They are unaware of what CRT is. They often get information through social media and other means. They tend to believe it when they see it, and bring that to the school district, and say, "This is something that we cannot have in our school district." I think they are, as previous speakers have mentioned, operating a bit out of fear and definitely out of misinformation.

We need to be in a place where school districts can share what they are doing (National School Boards Association, 2021). As was stated, districts in Michigan are not teaching CRT. It is not a curriculum of any sort. But in being forced to respond to protests and public comment periods that last hours and hours, what it is doing is causing boards to not do the work that they're supposed to do in a board meeting: governing the district and helping the superintendent lead. They're forced to spend their time and then administrative staff time answering questions, trying to provide information and thus detracting them from the mission of helping kids within their communities. We have to figure out a way as a society, as citizens of Michigan, to help school boards, back them up, give them support, and champion their work, so that they understand that they have people supporting them in their work. If they are a school district working on DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] initiatives, they would want to know that there are members of the community at board meetings who support and want to see that move forward. Many of them, at this time, feel attacked, and feel that the only place that they're hearing from is those that are spreading misinformation. It can be scary for a board member that is elected into that space. I fear, as this goes on, positive steps that have been taken to help minority children and minority groups in our public schools related to equity and equity of resources that are desperately needed are going to step back years, if not decades, of progress because of these pushes from groups interested in undermining that positive work.

As was mentioned, we have two bills in the Michigan legislature: House Bill 5097 and Senate Bill 460. Senate Bill 460 was just passed out of Senate Committee. Most, if not all, education organizations are opposed to this legislation. We are very concerned, from a school board and school governance perspective, of legislation like this if it passes. Our responsibility is to make sure that our teaching staff are doing things within the legal realm of Michigan's law. Because of the uncertainty of the bills' language, it's not particularly clear that a lot is left to interpretation,

and there is a financial penalty for any district that would teach racial issues. This will chill conversations even further, and boards will be forced to overcorrect to make sure that they're not subject to penalties of up to 5% of their school aid on an annual basis. That only further hurts our kids. Now we're hurting them financially. We're hurting them in an academic and understanding space as they need to learn about race, diversity, and equity. These bills are in process, yet it is unclear whether we will see them move all the way through. We would have to rely on our governor for a veto. So I would encourage those that are listening to contact their legislators and let them know that these bills will be detrimental to the kids in our school districts.

The primary message that we have shared with school districts is not to get caught up in buzzwords. Don't get into CRT, and even though it's a real thing, it has become a hot button issue. I have been in conversations with citizens that contact our office, and even the concept of equity has become a negative connotation. So we've urged school districts to talk about the positive work they are doing in the equity and diversity space and, yes, that includes race. But it also includes educational needs, poverty needs for at-risk populations, and academic needs related to special needs students. Equity is a conversation that should exist in every district regardless of whether it's a homogeneous population or not. Where there are differences, there is always diversity, and districts should do things to address diversity issues. If they have subgroups that are not achieving at a level compared to other groups in their school district, then that district should put together a plan and figure out what they can do and what resources they need to bring those students up. Some will say that is CRT in disguise. Clearly, we know that is not the case. It is about helping our most needy student populations, whomever they are, however they look, and whatever language they speak, to make sure that they can achieve and are given tools to achieve at levels that everybody else is expected to. It is going to be imperative, as we move forward in these conversations, that our communities are there to back up our school districts.

A phrase I have started hearing in the last six months is the "silent majority." Many of us participate in a forum like this, but are not speaking up to dispel misinformation when we hear about it at the coffee shop and are not showing up at school board meetings to say that doing X is the right thing to do for our district. We could be writing a letter to the editor that tells the administration or school board that you as a citizen support the work that they're doing in the district and that you support the work on diversity and inclusion. Those are the things that need to happen if we're going to keep moving this forward.

We will have an election year in 2022 in Michigan for school board members (Johnson, 2021). If we don't get the people that are currently on boards to run again or civic-minded, student-focused individuals to run for school board, we will see people running for our boards of education that are in fact the same ones at our board meetings objecting to CRT or not knowing what CRT is. That will have negative repercussions that will last for years in our districts. I will close by saying, please support your local school boards and their efforts to try to do the right thing. Back them up, and by backing them up, we can continue moving conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion forward. If we remain silent, we run the risk of harming many children in that silence.

Willie Brewster

From the administrators' perspective, the most critical thing that must take place is to understand exactly what CRT is. There has been a lot of misinformation to the point where the acronym has also been used to define culturally responsive teaching. So before we even dive into a conversation about critical race theory, we have to understand what it is and why it is necessary. I

understand critical race theory as deriving from legal studies in a country where slavery was legal, where the Three-fifths Compromise was legal, and where eugenics and *Plessy v. Ferguson* were legal (Annamma et al., 2017). To say that race does not exist without analyzing the ways in which it shows up in policy, practices, and messaging would be irresponsible for us as administrators and the people leading this work. The second important thing for us as administrators to do and all people engaged in this conversation is to understand the ways in which language, particularly around critical race theory, has been used and weaponized. The reality is that no PK-12 space is teaching critical race theory. It's not a part of the curriculum and not a part of what's being presented.

However, what we understand is the combination of the words "critical" and "race" makes it a very contentious topic. The former administration in the White House through the September 4th memo was able to mobilize a base where everyone began to reacting to the bait of "this has been hijacked," "this is unpatriotic," "this is propaganda," and really shifting the conversation in a space that it never once existed (Sprunt, 2021). Looking at the longitudinal history is what we have to do as administrators and begin to question the timing. In fact, we can utilize the tenets of critical race theory to analyze the timing when this conversation came about, the target audience that was used to mobilize this conversation, and how it's being used to weaponize the conversation around not just critical race theory but also race in its totality.

In addition, looking at the leverage points that we seek to demystify, one of the key tenets in critical race theory is that of whiteness as property, which has been turned around to indicate that to be white is bad (Capper & Green, 2013). When we start having conversations and centering individuals as the precipice of what the conversation is about, it naturally becomes a very defensive conversation. It allows us to not hold the situation as objects and to be subject to. Critical race theory allows us to come in and analyze the ways in which whiteness shows up in our policies, practices, and messaging, instead of saying that "hey, it's a black versus white issue" or "white is inherently bad." What it does do is it enables us to look at the concept of whiteness and the ways in which it shows up in multiple places.

The next thing we ought to look at when we think about critical race theory is not why it should not be presented in schools, but rather what benefits would it have by being presented in schools. A lot of rhetoric exists around critical race theory as unpatriotic and anti-American (Dixon, 2018). But one could argue that by presenting critical race theory and exposing and teasing out the ways in which race is intertwined with everything that we do would actually make us more patriotic and more American. It would put us in a position where we're able to engage in conversations historically and currently to analyze systems and history and be able to progress further.

In the PK-12 space, the challenge for administrators and educators in the critical race theory conversation is, first, getting involved in policy and policy decisions. According to Sonya Douglass Horsford,

The current moment shows that policy decisions are based on emotional, not rational policy decisions. We'd like to think otherwise, but critical policy analysis suggests that's not how it happens. The electorate is often driven by symbolism, rhetoric, and politics of spectacle. They want to see immediate results from policy decisions, new initiatives, or funding priorities. If they don't see measurable results quickly, they reject them as not working and move on to the next reform, initiative, or proposal. (Horsford, 2020)

So we need to get involved in conversations where, historically, educators have led and shaped education policy. But it's now in the hands of policymakers. We must help inform the people who are blessed to serve what is going on in this political realm and what is going on in schools. We need to let people know that CRT is not being taught in schools, but this is a way to analyze how policies, systems, and practices are being deployed.

The next thing that we must do as administrators is to get our hands dirty once we have been informed and to have conversations about how does race show up or does not show up in our curriculum. Where's the opportunity for us to be critical and to look at the ways in which the dominant narrative is being positioned? Where is the critical perspective of those who might have been the conquered versus the conqueror, and the absence of that voice, particularly in spaces predicated on race? How do we also use the lens of CRT to analyze our hiring practices? Even in the era of post-*Brown v. Board*, how do we use it to examine the idea of integration as mixing bodies, instead of mixing ideologies? How do we use the frameworks and tenets of critical race theory to ask about policies and practices related to hiring? How does race show up and play out? In addition, how can we use CRT in examining admissions and testing, looking to see where the breakdown is occurring there?

There are a number of ways that administrators can be and should be involved in this conversation. For instance, regarding the Senate Bill which includes a penalty of 5% reduction from school aid funding if districts were found to be in violation, we must be part of that conversation. In a school district, such as Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), race is inevitably apparent when you come in due to the demographics of the city. What has been happening feels like a targeted attack not just against the framework and conversation around critical race theory, but also against districts, such as DPSCD, that have "majority minority" individuals and constituents that we have the blessing of serving (Detroit Public Schools Community District, n.d.).

The final thing to understand is that we are still in the midst of a pandemic. We have seen schools serve as a centerpiece of community, providing food, internet service, housing, utility assistance, and other essential services (Horsford et al., 2021). We need to make sure that we are taking care of our constituencies and analyzing the ways in which things are starting to show up in our community and things that further disenfranchise our community as a whole. Ultimately, we need to serve as advocates, being critical of our policies and services, and being critical of our hiring practices. These are the ways in which I charge PK-12 administrators to get involved and get their hands dirty in this conversation.

Annette Christiansen

My presentation is titled *The Impact of Attacks on PK-12 Teachers: Enough is Enough*. I want to remind everybody that teaching is an act of optimism. As classroom teachers, we see the power and the potential of our students. That's why this conversation is so important, but also so terrifying to me as a classroom teacher with students who have become very successful adults. We need to make sure that the way we continue to improve as a country is to meet the needs of our students, encourage them to look at systems, and look at the way the country is set-up and what things need to change in order to be better tomorrow. James Baldwin (1955) says, "I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually" (p. 9).

I want to take a moment to talk about the way curriculum works in public schools in the state of Michigan (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.). The state sets the standards, and then local school boards adopt that curriculum, and create the curriculum to meet the state standards. In some districts, teachers are more involved in the creation of the curriculum. But in any case, locally elected school board members adopt that curriculum, and then it goes into the classroom and is taught by teachers who are working directly with students.

What is really important for us to think about is what the goal of education should be in this country, and that is to create critical readers, writers, and thinkers – people who can see the world as it exists today and who envision a world that tomorrow will be better than it is today, and preparing them for the means to be able to make that happen. The only way for that to happen is for them to be effective problem-solvers. And the only way to be an effective problem-solver is to be able to delve deeply into what the problems are, what the options are, and how we can do things that are in the best interest of our country and our students.

It is also important to understand how the whole narrative on critical race theory, the misconceptions, misinformation, and disinformation about it, and how that impacts the classroom teacher is it has become an ethical conflict for teachers. In Michigan, we have a Code of Educational Ethics that teachers are supposed to follow. For example, this Code includes:

- Confronting and taking reasonable steps to resolve conflicts between the Code and the implicit or explicit demands of a person or organization (1 B1)
- Increasing students' access to the curriculum, activities, and resources in order to provide a quality and equitable educational experience (2 C1)
- Seeking to understand students' educational, academic, personal, and social needs as well as students' values, beliefs, and cultural background(s) (3 B1) (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.)

If we allow people to push this agenda and to make us afraid to do what is right by our students and to talk about the history of this country in an honest way, then we are actually asking professionals to violate their ethics, the ethics that they agreed to participate in when they decided to become teachers.

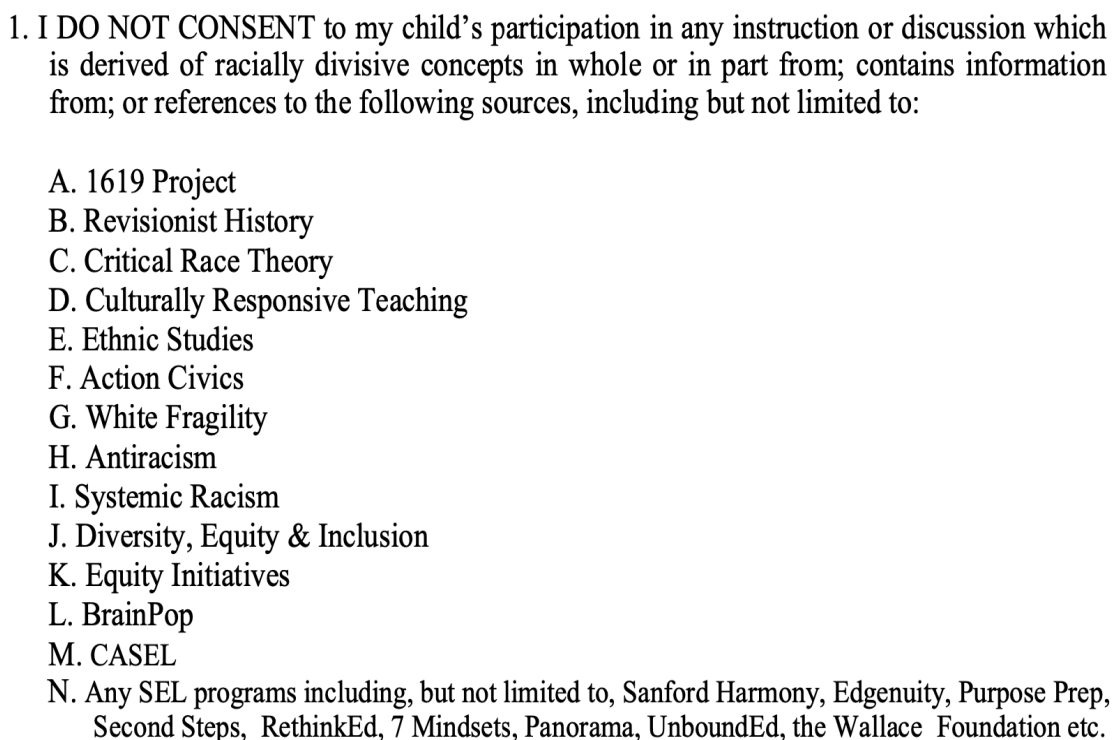
I would encourage you to look up Christopher Rufo (2021) and his tweet where he wanted the public to read something crazy and immediately conflate it with critical race theory and where he was going to work to decodify and recodify everything about race under the guise of critical race theory. It's just really unfair.

As a former English teacher, it was my goal to help my students understand the power and limitations of language. If you look at Senate Bill 460, what concerns me the most is the language around being "anti-American." I don't know what makes something anti-American since this is a country that was founded on revolt from another country. SB 460 is the type of law that could either be incredibly weak because the language is too broad, or it could be incredibly dangerous because the language is too broad. Mark Fancher talked about, from a legal perspective, some of the things that we are going to be up against. In regards to House Bill 5097, here's the problem with this particular law and it is the word "understood" in the sentence "However, the core academic curriculum must not, in any way, include any form of race or gender stereotyping or anything that could be understood as implicit race or gender stereotyping." We can't include anything that could be understood: understood by whom? What is the antecedent of whom? Understood by our students who are in the process of trying to learn to understand things? And that is our role as

teachers: to help them understand and see things. Or is it understood by some outside force or by some parents?

The other thing that I see, and I'm projecting down the line, what might happen is similar to this document circulating around Ohio (Protect Ohio Children Coalition, n.d.). This is a document that somebody is providing to parents, asking them to send this to the school, and say, "I do not consent to my child's participation in any instruction or references to the following sources" (see Image 1 below).

Image 1: Not Consent 1

- 
1. I DO NOT CONSENT to my child's participation in any instruction or discussion which is derived of racially divisive concepts in whole or in part from; contains information from; or references to the following sources, including but not limited to:
- A. 1619 Project
 - B. Revisionist History
 - C. Critical Race Theory
 - D. Culturally Responsive Teaching
 - E. Ethnic Studies
 - F. Action Civics
 - G. White Fragility
 - H. Antiracism
 - I. Systemic Racism
 - J. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
 - K. Equity Initiatives
 - L. BrainPop
 - M. CASEL
 - N. Any SEL programs including, but not limited to, Sanford Harmony, Edgenuity, Purpose Prep, Second Steps, RethinkEd, 7 Mindsets, Panorama, UnboundEd, the Wallace Foundation etc.

As we pointed out, critical race theory isn't a curriculum. So, can I not use the word "race"? Can I not talk about anti-racism or systemic racism? These are truths that have happened in this country. So how do I teach history? How do I teach literature? I can't teach any American literature that talks about race if I don't talk about some of these things. The document goes on further to talk about how they don't want social emotional learning for their child, which supports what we've been talking about in regards to misinformation or disinformation (see Image 2 below). Somebody is pulling the strings of people to get them to buy into how these things are bad. We know, as educators, that helping our students become the best versions of themselves is the foundation of what it is that we are trying to do as educators.

Image 2 – Not Consent 2

2. I DO NOT CONSENT to my child being given any Social Emotional Learning (SEL), including the following:
- A. Any referral of my child to a counselor, medical professional, social worker, within or outside the school for purposes of discussing SEL, or any of the topics listed herein.
 - B. Any reference to or participation in a personal analysis, evaluation or survey that reveals or attempts to affect my child's attitudes, habits, traits, opinions, beliefs or feelings concerning: political affiliations; religious beliefs or practices; mental or psychological conditions; or illegal, antisocial, self-incriminating or demeaning behavior;
 - C. Any advertisement of or participation in any group, organization, club, entity or activity that discusses or addresses sexual activity, sexual orientation or gender identity, under the guise of "bullying" or other rationale;
 - D. Any additional instruction and discussion, including but not limited to: classroom teachers, school staff, third-party providers, YouTube or other videos, films, live streaming, other audio-visual methods, textbooks, workbooks, or handout material, including any entity listed under Section 1 or any topic listed under Section 2.
 - E. Collection of data concerning any characteristics of my child listed in paragraph 2C above, whether collected by the school, the district, any other governmental entity, or a contractor or vendor, and whether or not such data is personally identifiable.

When I talk to teachers across the state, I hear them saying that they don't know how they're going to be able to teach their curriculum, their board-approved curriculum based on state standards, because there are implicit threats and sometimes actual threats to teachers about whether or not they are talking about critical race theory in their schools. For example, in Rochester Community Schools District, there is a parent Facebook page encouraging parents to have their children try to "catch their teachers" on camera saying something that is viewed as inappropriate. I'm not sure how far that's going to go, but we have teachers who are overwhelmed and struggling to continue as educators. We already have a major teacher shortage, and this situation is going to perpetuate the problem. And that's not going to be good for our students.

What a classroom teacher can do is to make sure that you're following your school board adopted curriculum. Don Wotruba was talking about how important it is to elect school board members who will do the right thing for our students. As a teacher, you should look at your collective bargaining agreement for language that supports the instruction of "controversial" issues or some version of academic freedom. We also want to make sure that you don't fall into traps. If you have a student who's trying to trap you into saying something or to get into an idea that's off topic or something that is racially or emotionally charged in the classroom, make sure that you take a step back. You're the adult in the room, and you figure out how you can redirect the student to something that is appropriate. If you get into any trouble or you think that there's trouble, you should contact your union, your building representative, your president, or your UniServ director

if you are a member of the Michigan Education Association (MEA). If you are a member of the American Federation of Teachers Michigan (AFT Michigan), they have a similar structure. The last thing I want to point out is we have to stand together. MEA and our parent organization, the National Education Association, have an Honesty in Education Pledge (Michigan Education Association, n.d.). You can sign this document that says that you support honesty in education. As teachers, we want to do things that are developmentally appropriate for our students. And it is important that you give teachers who have been trained to teach students the rights, responsibilities, and ability to teach the history of this country in a way that helps us move forward and be better than we were yesterday.

Lamar L. Johnson

My talk is titled *Black(ness) is, Black(ness) ain't: Critical Race English Education*. Before I get started, I want to share with you some quotes from social media about CRT and the pushback we've been receiving:

- I don't have to make white kids feel bad for being white.
- What this means for America is not us common together, but rather a more divided nation.
- Students go to school to learn, and our curriculum should not be teaching students to stereotype each other, based on race or gender or to view themselves or their country poorly as a result. My plan will promote respect among Michigan students and patriotism for the United States and the opportunity it provides to all, regardless of one's background.

Critical race theory isn't divisive, but white supremacy is divisive. Anti-black racism is divisive, creating curriculum that is grounded in white logic. CRT demands that we thoroughly examine the endemic nature of race, racism, whiteness, and white supremacy. CRT is talked about in higher education spaces, but it is under-theorized and under-utilized in PK-12 spaces.

When I listen to conversations about banning CRT in schools, people are quick to talk about how it would alter the teaching of history and social studies because students would be learning incorrect history about the United States. I disagree with that statement. Let's talk about how students learn incorrect history through subject areas, such as English language arts. I believe it's imperative that we think about English education and English language arts (ELA) classrooms because ELA classrooms and curriculum are centered around white literature, white mainstream English, and white ways of existing, being, thinking, and speaking in the world (Johnson, 2021).

So, who has access to the curriculum? "Oftentimes, the curriculum is viewed as neutral knowledge," as something race neutral (Baszile, 2009, p. 10). But it is actually very political. It centers the experiences of White people, whiteness, and white ways of being in the world, while people who come from racial and linguistic minority backgrounds are often minimized, and their lived experiences are not centered in the curriculum. Some think that curriculum is just standards, indicators, lesson plans, and instruction, but it's bigger than that (Johnson, 2017). I believe that curriculum is autobiographical. Drawing from the work of Denise Taliaferro Baszile (2009), who talks about curriculum as autobiographical, how we bring our many selves into that space, such as our race, class, and gender selves, informs our philosophy of education and how we see children, as well as our career decisions and pedagogical practices in the classroom.

The omission of critical race conversations is an example of racial violence (Johnson, 2021). For example, the whitewashed, state-sanctioned curriculum and tests that Black youth are required to study misrepresent many aspects of their lived experiences. When people hear the phrase “state-sanctioned violence,” depictions of police officers and police brutality come to mind. However, state-sanctioned violence can also take place outside of the criminal justice system, and can include institutions such as schools, hospitals, social services, child welfare, and immigration. When I say the state-sanctioned curriculum, it derives from state- and government-funded policies, practices, and procedures that police, surveil, and punish Black lives through the curriculum we teach (Johnson, 2021). The state-sanctioned curriculum represents a society that has an interest in all things that reflect White people, white culture, and whiteness. Hence, the anti-Black racism and state-sanctioned violence raging in the streets are no strangers to the classroom. The physical violence that happens in the streets bleeds into classrooms, and kills the humanity and spirit of our Black children and youth. In Black language, we like to say “the block is hot,” which means that the police are in the neighborhood or in Black communities. They’re trying to surveil Black lives and Black bodies, and that they’re up to no good (Johnson, 2021). I also believe that the block is hot not only outside of school spaces, but also the block is hot in classrooms.

I’d like to talk about the different types of anti-Black violence that erupts in classroom spaces (Johnson, 2021). When people think about violence, they often think about physical violence and abuse, such as hitting, pushing, beating, lynching, and police brutality. But violence is more dynamic than that. Thinking about symbolic violence, which is a metaphoric representation of violence, it stems from racial abuse, pain, and suffering against the spirit and humanity of Black people. For example, when students are in class, and we reject the experiences and lived realities of Black youth, and silence the voices of Black youth, that’s symbolic violence. Thinking about linguistic violence, a form of violence which marginalizes and polices the language of Black youth, which is referred to as Black language, and privileges and promotes white mainstream English. When teachers tell Black students that your language is not good, that it’s broken English and correct them, that kills their spirit and engages in linguistic violence.

We also have curricular and pedagogical violence, a form of violence that infiltrates schools’ curriculum through teaching texts, materials, and standards that center Eurocentric notions of existing and being in the world (Johnson, 2021). In enacting culturally irrelevant and unresponsive curriculum, texts are selected where Black youth do not see characters who look like and reflect them in dynamic and positive ways. In addition, we have systemic school violence, a form of violence that is deeply ingrained in school structures, processes, discourses, customs, policies, and laws, which oftentimes reflect racist and hegemonic ideologies. Systemic school violence manifests in underfunded and overcrowded schools, overrepresentation of Black youth in special education courses, tracking, and zero tolerance school discipline policies.

These acts of violence come from this notion of “white imagination,” which centers white ideologies, logics, theories, and ways of being in the world. In regards to white imagination in the English language arts classroom, Toni Morrison (1993) talks about the white literary imagination, where the texts that we use for literature, writing, and grammar instruction are through a white lens.

In my classroom, I want to center my English language arts curriculum through the Black gaze that emphasizes blackness, Black experiences, and Black radical imagination. The Black radical imagination is “a method of thought” and “embodied stories” where one begins to (re)imagine the world in which we live through understanding how issues from the past (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, whiteness, patriarchy, and white supremacy) dangle in our present moment

and will inform our future (Johnson, 2017, pp. 478, 499). Within the Black radical imagination, David Stovall states that the purpose is “not in the sense of reform, but to embrace the spirit of the radical imaginary that affirms that something different can be created. It is a *fugitive space* – a space where building requires tearing down in order to make anew” (Stovall, 2014, p. 71). When I was teaching high school and now working with pre-service teachers at Michigan State University, what we’ve had to do is to eradicate our current curriculum and began to start anew. When we say “fugitive space,” we are running *away* from something and also *toward* something, in this case, toward a more justice-oriented curriculum and equity-based society.

I began to think about how race and racism show up in my English language arts curriculum teaching high school English. I created this theory and pedagogy titled “Critical Race English Education” (CREE) (Johnson, 2021). CREE challenges teachers to positively reimagine ELA classrooms where Black lives, minds, and brilliance matter. It helps us center Black futures. The Black literacy tenet of Critical Race English Education is crucial because it allows us to reimagine how we do Black tech, culture, and knowledge. CREE is crucial for these reasons, which should motivate us to have an unwavering commitment to creating and maintaining classrooms as well as curricular engagement, practices, and approaches that value, love, and care for Black lives, minds, and brilliance. Thus, we can better reimagine ways of teaching ELA that embrace the humanity, beauty, and strength of blackness.

Here are some questions that guide my classroom and curriculum: How do Black lives matter in English language arts classrooms? How are white supremacy and anti-black racism reinscribed through our disciplinary discourses and pedagogical practices? Whose identities are included and reflected in ELA curriculum and pedagogy? How are our curriculum and pedagogy inclusive of Black youth? How are we using Black youth life histories and experiences to inform our mindset, curriculum, and pedagogical practices in the classroom?

Critical Race English Education, therefore, addresses issues of race, racism, whiteness, white supremacy, and power within school and out-of-school spaces (Johnson, 2021). It dismantles dominant texts. It highlights how language and literacy can be used as tools to uplift and transform the lives of people who are often in the margins of society and P-20 spaces. The most important tenet of CREE is the Black literacies tenet and how we need to build on Black literacies that Black youth bring to classrooms, which affirm the lives, spirit, language, and knowledge of Black people and Black culture. They are grounded in Black Liberatory Thought, and include an array of texts, such as tattoos, poems, novellas, graphic novels, technology/social media sites, oral histories/storytelling, body movement/dance, music, and prose. CREE counters anti-Blackness by showcasing an unapologetic, unashamed, and unconditional love for Blackness and for Black lives. Moreover, I created a Critical Race English Education Reading and Writing Workshop model for elementary, middle, and high schools (Johnson, 2021). In this workshop model, we have thematic planning, CREE objectives, essential questions, and text set.

If we want to advance CRT in schools, which really isn’t used in those spaces, we need to redefine what Blackness actually is. We need to meditate on Blackness as an action and practice of positive thinking and self-awareness. Blackness is an act of self-care, collective care, and resistance (Dumas & Ross, 2016). It is not monolithic; it’s very dynamic, fluid, and complex. It reflects Black people’s culture, race, ethnicity, language, literacies, and ways of life.

Lastly, I’d like to share a meditation on Blackness called “Black(ness) is, Black(ness) ain’t” (Johnson, 2021). So Black is love, Black is beautiful, Black is joy, Black is fierce. Black is aggressive, but Black is also peaceful. Black ain’t evil, Black ain’t torture. Black is unapologetic, Black

is free. Black ain't afraid, Black ain't monolithic. Black is endless, Black is gentle. Black is complex, but Black is also simple. Black is resilient, Black is strength, Black is vibrant, and Black is opulent. Black is light, and Black is also dark. Black is smooth, Black is delicate, Black is rough. Black is off the chain, Black is dope, Black is magical, Black is limitless. Blackness is.

Cheryl E. Matias

We're seeing CRT all over the media. We're seeing it in legislative bills. In Kentucky where I work, the bills are not even CRT-specific; they're taking up race, sex, and religion altogether (Bill Request 69, 2022). So the questions are: What is CRT? Is it being taught in PK-12 schools? Why the hyper-mania, hysteria, and hullabaloo?

What is CRT? Critical race theory stems from legal studies, and then was taken up in educational studies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). If your children are coming home reading these books, they are not doing CRT. However, the ideas espoused in CRT – which is racial justice, anti-racism, social justice, and equity – all of that can be embedded in PK-12 teachings in ways that can be manifested in the classroom. In other words, although CRT is not taught in PK-12 schools, some of its ideas are used by teachers to create a more just educational system. CRT derives from critical legal studies in various law schools across the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). It is a transdisciplinary analytical tool typically used in higher educational research, such as law or education, to investigate the impact laws, policies, and sanctions have on race. It does have various tenets. It is used as an analytical tool to deconstruct how we're engaging in these policies and practices. Some of the CRT tenets are: experiential knowledge; commitment to social justice; challenging dominant narratives; interdisciplinary; and intersectionality of race and racism alongside gender, class, ability, and sexuality (Matias et al., 2021).

Is CRT the only theory on race? Absolutely not. Some of the other theories that deconstruct race, racism, and white supremacy in US society and beyond are: critical whiteness studies, sociology and philosophy of race, culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical social theory of race, and racial psychology (see Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Leonardo, 2009; Mills, 2017). There's a myriad more theories that can be used. For teacher education, we're hearing words like "multicultural education," "culturally responsive teaching" per Geneva Gay's work (2018), "culturally relevant pedagogy" per Gloria Ladson-Billings' work (2021), and "culturally sustaining pedagogies" coming from Django Paris and Samy Alim (2017). Now we're hearing about abolitionist teaching, which comes from Bettina Love (2019). All of them may have aspects that draw from the ideas of CRT, but I wouldn't say it's CRT in and of itself. I want us to be clear that when we engage in racially just teaching and practice, it doesn't necessarily mean it's CRT.

Does race and racism have anything to do with PK-12 education? Educators talk about "achievement" gaps, overrepresentation of Black and Brown students in special education, lack of teacher diversity, low standardized test scores, push out rates, and the misuse of punitive measures. For example, in Ohio, African American girls were not allowed to wear Afro puffs (Klein, 2013). These K-12 issues impact predominantly Black and Brown PK-12 students. What frustrates me most is people can engage with racial statistics. For instance, people will say, Black and Brown students do not graduate in rates similar to White students, yet they do not have any racial analysis to understand why that phenomenon happens. It's as if they're nitpicking on race whenever they want to. CRT can be used to build a more racially equitable teaching practice.

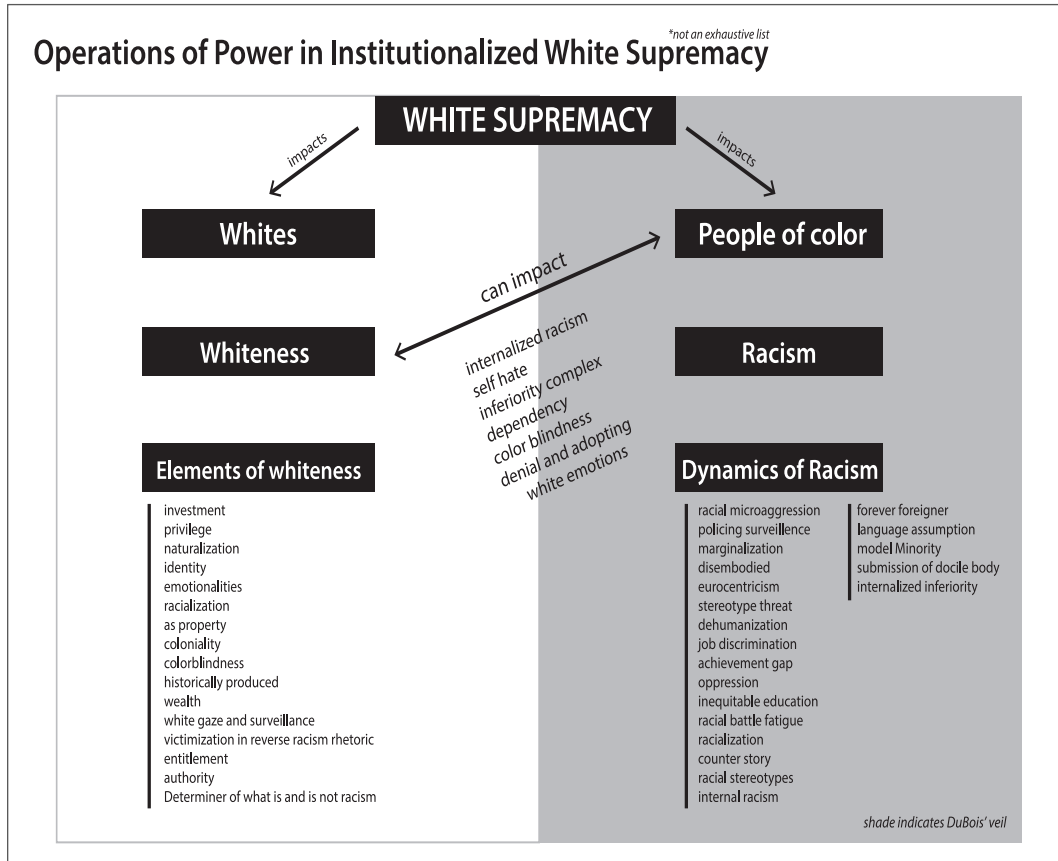
Is CRT being taught in schools? If it were, why did I have to wait to get my Ph.D. at UCLA to study it? I could have learned it in schools, or my three children could have learned it in schools.

So let's be realistic where it's showing up in teacher education. CRT tenets include challenging dominant ideology, interdisciplinary studies, honoring experiential knowledge, and commitment to social justice (Matias et al., 2021). When you translate these tenets to teacher education, it's about engaging in a teacher education that is very different from what we know. For example, if we want to honor experiential knowledge, we need to start thinking about how we can make Ethnic Studies pathways into teacher education, because Black Studies, Chicano/a Studies, and Asian American Studies have a very different canon that students are drawing from, which can better inform a very different approach to teacher education (Matias et al., 2021). Another aspect is challenging dominant ideology. Christine Sleeter (2001) argued that there is an overwhelming presence of whiteness in teacher education. She made this statement 20 years ago, and it is still relevant today. One thing we need to do in teacher education is to challenge white ideology directly and not just finding band-aid aspects like, how can we engage in anti-racist pedagogy? Part of that is understanding not only how it impacts Black, Indigenous, and people of color, but also who gets privileged in white supremacy ideology.

In regards to whiteness and white supremacy, we talk about racial microaggressions and racial oppression, but we do not focus on what whiteness is. "If Blackness is a social construction that embraces Black culture, language, experiences, identities and epistemologies, then whiteness is a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization" (Matias et al., 2014, p. 290). Diversity and inclusion efforts will always fall short, if we don't engage with that part of the definition of whiteness that includes a power structure: "Unlike Blackness, whiteness is normalized because white supremacy elevates whites and whiteness to the apex of the racial hierarchy" (Matias et al., 2014, p. 290). Hence, it's not about bringing different perspectives to the table, when you're not going to understand that there's a power structure that makes one perspective reign supreme.

There's a lot of terminology being thrown out at you, but the big issue is not about racism in schools, more so than it is about white supremacy (Matias, 2016, p. 186; see Image 3 below). In fact, we wouldn't have racism if there wasn't white supremacy. White supremacy impacts whites and people of color, albeit differently, and we can see how it impacts education. My research focuses on emotionality, which is one of the biggest aspects in teacher education today. We can't even get to understanding CRT, let alone any anti-racist pedagogy, until we investigate the emotionality of whiteness, its defensiveness and guilt, and its impact on our education systems. White supremacy impacts white people by producing an ideological ideal of the self, which no one can ever truly attain. Teacher education people say, "I've never been a part of that community, but I want to give back." The question, then, is: what is it that you have taken, such that now you feel compelled to give back to a community that you've never been a part of? There's a lot of psycho-social impact of whiteness on white people, the predominant teaching for force in the US, as well as on students of color (Matias, 2016).

Image 3: Operations of Power in Institutionalized White Supremacy



We need to understand that unresolved anxieties about race and racism is an unhealthy attachment to whiteness which creates a condition whereby any mention of diversity or inclusion, let alone racial equity, brings forth a wave of unsubstantiated emotional projections operationally employed to (1) stop racial equity and (2) in doing so, maintain white racial power. All this to maintain the sensibilities and power of whiteness in a white supremacist structure (Matias, 2016). In teacher education, the discussion of whiteness must be directly pursued if we're ever to engage in racial justice.

Roland Sintos Coloma

For our Question and Answer portion, we have one question, and I'll open it up to the panelists for their responses given the limited time that we have left. And then, we will close with Nancy Campbell of the Metro Bureau. The comment and question for the panel is: I am deeply concerned about this systemic attack on academic freedom. How can educators prevent students from discussing issues of race and gender? And if the Senate and House bills pass, will I be in violation of the legislation if race and gender become part of any classroom conversation?

Don Wotruba

Annette Christiansen addressed much of this in her presentation. There is so much left to the beholder in this legislation and how to define certain words. I think that's meant to chill these exact instances that the questions posed. You will even find parents that will purposefully have their kids enter into conversations to trap teachers, which is quite nefarious. This is going to cause teachers to pull back from having or even letting students have conversations. The answer is that, even if the legislation may not specifically say that a teacher would be responsible in this situation, it doesn't prevent a parent from suing to say that there was a violation of these bills, if they were to pass.

Mark Fancher

Annette pointed out a lot of the problems with the language of the legislation. The legal challenges would probably be successful, but beyond that, there are times when it's necessary to engage in civil disobedience. If this were to pass, it would be incumbent upon teachers, students, and everybody involved to ignore it and just do it. Just go ahead and talk about the truth. Tell the truth, teach the truth, and learn the truth (African American Policy Forum, n.d.). Whatever the consequences may be, there are times when you have to take those kinds of consequences. The stakes are too high.

Cheryl E. Matias

There is a pending lawsuit that is going to be happening in Arizona (Pendharkar, 2021). The Tucson Unified School District has proven that the banning of Mexican American Studies was based on racism, which set a precedent for the rest of the US courts (Cabrera & Chang, 2019). They are mobilizing together with a legal team to challenge these laws on behalf of students of color. This will be a very interesting case to watch and see how it eventually filters down. We're at a time period when civil rights terminologies and concepts are being re-appropriated in very perverse ways. Hence, it's important that we are very clear about what we mean by equity and justice.

Cleveland Hayes

It's important for PK-12 educators to recognize the power that we have as teachers. Every state in the country has a massive teacher shortage. So how can educators leverage that to make sure some of these bills don't get passed? That lawsuits, if they happen, that we need to mobilize around them. I've been doing some work with a group of teachers in Indiana around developing "courageous leadership" around these issues (Hybels, 2009). As a teacher educator, I teach my students how to have courageous leadership, to recognize and leverage their power as teachers. I think it is by design that teacher educators and teachers throughout the country are primarily focused on the curriculum, teaching math or correct grammar, whatever the case may be, and are not really empowered to use their power. I have a student, who is a male of color, speaks Spanish, and is a physics teacher. I'm trying to get him to understand that he has a tremendous amount of power to move this conversation forward if he uses it. I want him to understand that, you are a physics

teacher and you speak Spanish, your school or district administration is not going to get rid of you, so use that power for good.

Annette Christiansen

The unions are behind you. Join your union.

Willie Brewster

In the same spirit of sit-ins and boycotts, and I see in the chat “good trouble” (Lewis, 2012), you have to know the system in which are in and be resistant if the greater good is at stake.

Nancy Campbell

I expected to be enlightened today, to learn a lot, to be instructed, but I did not expect to be inspired. The speakers have inspired me. It reminds me of that saying “see something, say something.” You all took it one step further: “do something.” Whether it was about making sure who gets elected to school boards, sending something positive to leaders in our school districts about what they are doing, getting involved in the conversation and doing something about it. We need to have this discussion at the district level and even with a broader audience on critical race theory. If not now, when? We need you. You’re wonderful. I really felt this webinar was critical. I want everyone to see the presentation. Each perspective was different, which made it such a rich experience for me, a retired superintendent who would like to be involved, and you spurred me on. I will be involved.

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Conjuring the Devil: Historicizing Attacks on Critical Race Theory

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore white supremacy's "projection" of the "devil" by focusing on its construction and deployment of what Stanley Cohen (1972/2002) terms "folk devils" or those who are seen as deviant. We argue Critical Race Theory (CRT) and conjoining equity centered discourses and practices are situated as a folk devil. Understanding the significance of history to CRT analysis, this paper historicizes current attacks on CRT by looking to the evidentiary record of previous conservative efforts to ban "subversive knowledge" and to categorize it as a folk devil. We suggest these attacks are part of a larger political project of white epistemological capture, which is a tactic used to foreclose emancipatory thought and solidify violent white ways of knowing and being. Drawing on narratives from conservative politicians and thought leaders, this paper utilizes critical race theory's constructs of racial realism and whiteness as property to unpack white supremacy's efforts at preservation. In doing so, we argue that the folk devil is necessary for the cohering of normative innocent white identity, the (re)calibration of the state towards whiteness, and serves as a sacrifice to white anger and disgust. Such insidious moves recenter the patterned violence of whiteness that aims to dehumanize, exclude, repress, and suppress. This paper concludes with implications for practice.

Keywords: *critical race theory, censorship, curriculum policy, whiteness, educational reform*

Schooling, while often portrayed as the great equalizer, can be understood as an institution embedded within and constitutive of white supremacy and white racial dominance. How white supremacy gets operationalized in education is vast and multifaceted and often aims to maintain its salvation by parasitic means (Henry, 2016, 2021, 2022), by exclusion, distortion, abjection, and dispossession of people of color. One can easily witness the shape of white supremacy in both the mundane and extravagant realities of education in various forms including inequitable funding and culturally irrelevant pedagogical and curricular choices. Such forms are demonstrative of points among a constellation of practices—both material and nonmaterial—that solidify schools as sites of suffering that socially, politically, and ideologically fund whiteness and white dominance (Dumas, 2014; Jenkins, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2018; Matias, 2016). These racialized realities can be understood as configurations of power relations in education.

One central area of examination and where education and politics have perpetually collided is around school curriculum. Education scholars have long noted curriculum as a politically charged and ideologically situated instrument (Apple, 1993; Gordon, 1997; Kliebard, 1987; Pinar, 2007; Watkins, 1993). As such, struggles over curriculum are infused with the racial regimes of the day. Despite an ethical imperative to create curriculum that reflects the wide array of cultures,

histories, and knowledges of a multicultural populace, curriculum across the United States remains overwhelmingly Eurocentric and proffers notions of American exceptionalism.

The presidency of Donald Trump renewed and intensified public and political interest in K-12 school curriculum. Following a series of incidences such as separating immigrant families and locking children in cages, all in efforts to “make America great again,” political conservatives took aim at what they regarded as a curriculum that was anti-American and decidedly indoctrinating children in “critical race theory,” a theory, often taught in graduate and professional schools, that seeks to analyze the role of race and racism in American institutions. Beyond the factual reality that what is often taught in K-12 schools typically reifies and reproduces an Americanism that, as Toni Morrison (1992) remarks, “means white,” many states are considering legislation to censor critical race theory (CRT) in schools. To date, more than nine states have passed laws censoring any mention of CRT or other efforts to address historical truth about the role of inequity in society. A recent study by Pollock and Rogers (2022), found that at least 800 districts enrolling 35% of K-12 students are impacted by these restrictive efforts.

Much of the legislation is based on the profound lie that critical race theory hates white people and aims to harm children psychologically. In reference to his state’s CRT ban, Republican Governor Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma said, “we can and should teach...history without labeling a young child as an ‘oppressor’ or requiring he or she feel guilt or shame based on their race or sex.” The flagrant miscategorization of CRT and efforts to silence knowledge about past and current realities of racial power remind us of the ever constant need to remain vigilant to how white supremacy marshals its power.

This vigilance, as critical race theorist David Stovall (2013) wrote, “can sometimes make you feel like you’re up against evil incarnate—the devil” (p. 289). In his discussion of Critical Race Praxis, Stovall (2013) uses the imagery of “fightin’ the devil 24/7,” to illustrate the perpetual hauntings of white supremacy and the efforts needed to exorcise it. This paper is interested in the same “devil” Stovall names—white supremacy—but focuses on its seductive, morpheic masquerade. In this paper, we explore white supremacy’s “projection” of the “devil” by focusing on its construction and deployment of what sociologist Stanley Cohen (1972) terms “folk devils” or that which is perceived as deviant. Historically, the folk devil is used as both scapegoat and a sign for social problems during periods of uncertainty and panic. We submit in the post-Trump presidency, CRT and conjoining equity-centered discourses and practices are situated as a folk devil.

Moreover, this paper illuminates the attacks on CRT are a constitutive part of what we term *white epistemological capture*, a tactic used to foreclose emancipatory thought and solidify violent white ways of knowing and being. White epistemological capture attempts to capture and arrest people into a distorted way of seeing and knowing the world. Importantly, white epistemological capture is not merely an individual quirk or oddity, but rather is buttressed by structural racism and serves to solidify and expand white supremacist ideology and normalize inequitable material conditions. This paper historicizes current attacks on CRT by looking at the evidentiary record of previous historical efforts to ban “subversive knowledge” and to categorize it as a folk devil. This paper utilizes critical race theory to trace and unpack white supremacy’s efforts at preservation. In doing so, we suggest that the folk devil is necessary for the cohering of a normative, innocent white identity, the (re)calibration of the state towards whiteness, and serves as a sacrifice to white anger and disgust. Such insidious moves recenter the patterned violence of whiteness that aims to dehumanize, exclude, repress, and suppress. This paper ends with implications for educational justice.

Critical Race Theory as a Folk Devil

In 1972 sociologist Stanley Cohen published a canonical study on the socially constructed nature of deviance. Cohen was interested in the relationship between media representation and youth subcultures in the 1960s. Cohen's desire to better understand two youth groups, "The Mods" and "Rockers," led him to write about the role of moral panics in society and the elements that underpin them, namely the "folk devil." Cohen articulated how the media was central in casting minor vandalism by a few social group members and overlaying those actions to the broader group. Such frequent negative representation triggered public concern, intensified policing, and subsequently increased juvenile arrests. Central to Cohen's analysis is the notion of moral panic. Cohen (1972) remarks,

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges, and or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (p. 9)

Notably, Cohen articulates the elements of a moral panic, arguing that moral panics are defined by what is seen as at odds with or a threat to societal values and interests. Central to his understanding of moral panics are two other notions. The first is that fear or concern about what is categorized as nefarious is a hallmark of moral panic (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). One can think of concerns, for instance, about what might be seen as sexually deviant or sexually immoral behaviors. A host of longstanding, nonevidence based policies around abstinence, as well as increasingly new policies limiting the educational lives of LGBTQIA youth, could be included here. Secondly, central to moral panics are distortions. Cohen (1972) posits that sensationalism, melodrama, and deliberate miscategorizations are key features of a moral panic, often blowing out of proportion the reality of the "threat." The folk devil conjoins and stands as a base for moral panics.

For Cohen, folk devils are labeled as threats to society's social order and presumed interests. In similar earlier works, scholars have located the folk devil as that which stands outside the norm. In their study on policing, Stuart Hall and colleagues (1978) gave a provocative definition of the folk devil. As they explain it,

In one sense, the Folk Devil comes up at us unexpectedly, out of the darkness, out of nowhere. In another sense, he is all too familiar; we know him already before he appears. He is the reverse image, the alternative to all we know: *the negation*. He is the fear of failure that is secreted at the heart of success, the danger that lurks inside security, the profligate figure by whom Virtue is constantly tempted...When things threaten to disintegrate, the Folk Devil not only becomes the bearer of all our social anxieties, but we turn against him with the full wrath of our indignation. (p. 161)

Hall et al.'s (1978) framing of the folk devil is particularly useful in our current discussion of recent anti-CRT/anti-truth/anti-equity bans. For Hall et al. (1978), the folk devil already holds a location of "other" in the social discourse; it is that which stands against "virtue" and goodness. As the "other," the folk devil is positioned as a menace to society and the negation of normativity.

Of course, one would be remiss not to situate the conversation of the folk devil within the socio-political realities of a society structured in white dominance. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2012) reminds us of the racial grammar that organizes everyday life. Bonilla-Silva (2012) argues that the racial grammar “structures cognition, vision, and even feelings on all sort of racial matters. This grammar normalizes the standards of white supremacy” (p. 173). As such, it is possible that in many instances, the folk devil is constructed within the interpretive gaze and for the political purposes of white supremacy. It stands to reason then that CRT, a theory aimed at unpacking and disrupting the multifaceted violence of white supremacist orthodoxy, could be labeled a “heretical” folk devil (Henry, 2019).

We argue, in part, that CRT and adjoining equity-centered discourses are situated as the folk devil in current conservative movements that aim to maintain white supremacist ideology in education. By conjuring CRT as the folk devil and instigating a moral panic around curriculum that deals honestly with historical truth and is reflective of the many cultures within the United States, conservative leaders are attempting to address white racial anxieties around an increasingly diverse U.S. and slippages in electoral power, and solidify ideological hegemony with respect to curriculum (Matias, 2016b; Yancy, 2008). Critically, as Hall et al. (1978) note, the folk devil seems to come out of nowhere, but “in another sense, he is all too familiar.” The folk devil of critical race theory is yet related to the long line of previous folk devils used to stoke and pacify white racial anxiety. In the next section, we provide a glancing account of previous efforts on behalf of white supremacy to maintain itself by excluding historical perspectives and accounts that accurately depict its violence.

Historicizing Current Attacks on Critical Race Theory

Current legislation against CRT and other equity-based models, seeks to eliminate or replace historical truths for the seductive indoctrinations of white supremacy that preserves white ignorance, innocence, and insolence. While current conservative mobilizations may seem shocking or even tied to the Trump administration, to locate them solely within the present would be to miss the longstanding history of white epistemological capture, a tactic used to foreclose emancipatory thought and corral others to believe in the distortions of whiteness. In this section, we move from a presentism that sees these formations as representative of the here and now and locate the current curricular attacks within the wider skirt of white supremacy. Specifically, we focus on two cases—multiculturalism and ethnic studies—to illuminate this patterned practice of (re)creating folk devils as a tactic to advance white epistemological capture.

The Folk Devil of Multiculturalism

The movement for multicultural curriculum is connected to advances made during the civil rights movement and historically oppressed groups’ struggles for greater (and accurate) representation in learning contexts. Although occupied with educational equity for students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, multicultural education aims to create an atmosphere in which “a wide range of cultural groups, such as women, handicapped persons, ethnic groups, and various regional groups, will experience educational equity” (Banks, 1981, p. 13). Educational institutions including K-12 schools, colleges, and universities responded to the concerns and activism of marginalized groups who were dissatisfied with inequities in the educational system. Such institutional responses “defined the earliest conceptualization of multicultural education” (Gorski, 1999). In

response, conservative discourses attempted to target multiculturalism as a folk devil by claiming that it is a direct antagonism to more traditional (and implicitly Christian) American values. Attacks on multiculturalism occurred at multiple governmental scales and to various degrees of vitriol, from tempered opposition seemingly based on logistical concerns regarding implementation to outright virulent hostility and explicitly racist attacks. We draw on local news outlets and broader national media instances where the discourses that structured the anti-multiculturalism sentiment played out and contributed to white epistemological capture.

Early attacks on multicultural education tracked along three themes: (1) concerns regarding the efficiency and usefulness of laws requiring multicultural education; (2) a framework of liberalism that stressed that multiculturalism attempted to focus on groups when “true” American values should focus on the individual; and (3) violent rhetoric that painted multiculturalism as a subversive plot with the sole purpose of undermining mainstream Western values and attempting to condemn and overthrow America. Taken together, these attacks are demonstrative of white supremacist distortion tactics used to produce a racial folk devil. Beyond constructing multiculturalism as a folk devil, white leaders peddled the larger project of white epistemological capture. Recall white epistemological capture is a historically rooted maneuver that forecloses emancipatory and counter-hegemonic thought. In moving beyond traditional Eurocentric norms, multiculturalism stood as a perceived affront to those norms and needed to be reined in. The three themes of resistance to multiculturalism aim to debase its importance and allow whiteness to remain hegemonic in education.

Many representatives who opposed multiculturalism argued that the bills under legislative consideration were redundant because teachers were already using inclusive approaches. For example, Nebraska state Senator Kate Witek claimed that numerous teachers told her they “were teaching multicultural education before the law went into effect. The law only requires these teachers to document what they are doing” (Multicultural Education, 1995). Similarly, Minnesota state Senator Jane Krentz criticized the usefulness of the bill, arguing “We don’t need more paperwork... The focus shouldn’t be on bean counting, but on putting that time and energy into making a difference in kids’ lives” (Diversity Rule, 1997). Representatives claimed that the pedagogy and curriculum approaches that multicultural mandates demanded amounted to useless government interference and would serve only to take time and resources away from classrooms and children. Similar to current anti-CRT rhetoric, such claims focus on a “there” that is nonexistent. Like today’s opposition who claim CRT is ubiquitous in schools, Witek suggested that a widespread teaching of multiculturalism abounded.

Moreover, arguments that eschewed structural and communitarian logics, in favor of individualism proliferated. The decades following World War II marked a move away from President Roosevelt’s New Deal social welfare policies. Simultaneously, there was an expansion in ideas of rugged individualism and calls for limited government interference that anchored demands for cultural assimilation into the (white, Christian) “American” way of life. Tennessee Senator, Lamar Alexander, who also served as the Secretary of Education in the early 1990s responded to questions asking whether individualism could be an appropriate solution to the growing effects of multiculturalism by saying, “Yes. We are a nation of individuals, not a nation of groups. There's no other way to make sense of America unless we honor and recognize that” (Alexander, 1999). For Alexander, it is the prominence of the individual and liberties that make it possible to understand American culture. Alexander and other political conservatives positioned multiculturalism as purporting rights based on group organization, which made multiculturalism antithetical to American ideals.

In the early 1990s, conservative rhetoric furthered the idea that true American values were based on individualism and claimed that the main goal of multiculturalism was to promote autonomy based on ethnic and racial group identification. Conservative pundits claimed that multiculturalism endangered America. Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., author of *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1992), claimed that “the bonds of national cohesion in the republic are sufficiently fragmented already,” and the purpose of public education should be to strengthen these bonds, not weaken them, by promoting what he considered group objectivity and the heightening of “ethnic tensions” (Walters, 1991). Conservative rhetoric worked to normalize liberalism’s tenet of individuality and policy efforts that attempted to reform or pushback against this agenda were portrayed as in conflict with American ideals. Multiculturalism was simultaneously casted as a folk devil and un-American.

In the months leading up to the 1992 presidential election, John Leo, writer and columnist for *U.S. News & World Report*, criticized what he perceived as “racial gerrymandering.” He described it as a process that “makes too much of tribal identity” and exists in opposition to “normal politics” that attempts to eclipse race and build coalition while “the multicultural approach keeps the racial barriers high and assumes that racial groups, not individuals, must be empowered” (Leo, 1992). This type of rhetoric, used by national-level politicians and media personalities, is an example of white epistemological capture that reached wide audiences by appealing to notions of liberalism and by leveraging criticisms against multiculturalism.

Calls to cement individualism are also calls of white epistemological capture since they diminish communitarian ways of knowing and being, which is often an epistemology employed by communities of color (Henry, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Arresting the development of counter-hegemonic knowledge is central to the project of white epistemological capture. Additionally, by bracketing what is considered normative and constructing multiculturalism as a deviant folk devil, conservatives were engaging in white epistemological capture.

Similar to other attempts at casting multiculturalism as folk devil, conservative discourse made scornful attacks on multiculturalism by positing multiculturalism as overtly anti-American. Some even suggested that it was a movement which functioned to, as Oklahoma state senator Bill Greaves argued, “undermine the Christian culture on which [America] is based” (House Rejects Report, 1994). On several occasions, legislation was introduced to counter the alleged anti-America multicultural agenda. Senate Resolution 66, introduced by Washington Senator, Slade Gorton attempted to prevent the adoption of certain national history standards. The legislation stated that if any “federal agency provides funds for the development of the standards...the recipient of such funds should have a decent respect for the contributions of western civilization, and United States history, ideas, and institutions, to the increase of freedom and prosperity around the world.” This anti-multicultural rhetoric intricately tied together comments surrounding immigration at the end of the 20th century with the upsurge of xenophobia following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. For example, in 2003, Colorado Representative Tom Tancredo claimed that “massive immigration” and “bizarre and rabid multiculturalism” posed a serious threat to America and western civilization more broadly (108 Cong. Rec. 4507, 2003). Attempts to connect anti-multicultural rhetoric to terrorist attacks exacerbated racialized hysteria and extended moral panic across the United States.

Discourses positing multiculturalism as anti-American and anti-Western encouraged unconcealed hostility in other outlets. The 1994 Republican Party’s nominee for Florida’s 5th Congressional District, Don Garlits, reacted to a question on race relations by directly attacking multiculturalism. Garlits said, “This multicultural thing is wrong. We should teach America is great.

That's what I see that people want. Even black people that I talk to at the races are not interested in multiculturalism." When asked about schools and multicultural curriculum specifically, Garlits responded, "We need to teach that America is great. The people that don't like it, we should have the FBI investigate them. Bring them before grand juries and charge them with doing subversive, traitorous activities" (FL 05, 1994). Although these more outlandish proclamations tended to be denounced by the broader conservative party, the sentiment expressed was popular and widespread, especially at the local level.

While pushback to multiculturalism took many forms, aspects of the resistance mirror current opposition to CRT. There were attempts to cast group identity as antithetical to the American dream, calls for multiculturalism to be denounced because of purported anti-American and anti-west sentiments, and declarations to teach "America is great." Throughout these discourses, whiteness was normalized as structurally central to American culture. Attacks on multiculturalism were violent and only occasionally veiled contempt for nonwhite group cohesion and identity.

The Folk Devil of Ethnic Studies

The above case of the attacks on multiculturalism illustrates how white supremacy manifests in K-12 curriculum and how educational politics are implicated in that process. Conservative political thought positions itself as a driving force actively working against exploring topics of racial equity in the classroom in conjunction with advancing white supremacist ideologies. The limited engagement that students and educators have with issues of race and racism through traditional K-12 curriculum works to sustain whiteness and advance the project of white epistemological capture. Such limited engagement solidifies the significance of what scholars coin the ethnic studies movement. Like multiculturalism, conservative discourses were leveraged against ethnic studies in efforts to cast it as a folk devil that stands counter to American values. Ethnic studies invokes the histories, traditions, literature, and philosophies of racially minoritized groups in America (Banks, 2012; Monterio, 2010). The ethnic studies movement rejects the historical precedent of a white-centric telling of the social sciences, humanities, and arts through the curriculum and calls for the inclusion of historically minoritized voices in the classroom. Using the term movement also acknowledges the activist roots and perpetual struggle associated with racially minoritized communities claiming space through ethnic studies within the K-12 classroom (Owens, 2018).

The circumstances surrounding the Arizona's ethnic studies movement aptly illuminates how a counter-hegemonic educational approach (ethnic studies) gets cast as a folk devil and illustrates white epistemological capture. The Arizona case crystallizes the relationship between white supremacy, education policy, and curriculum in many ways. Arizona's political climate around anti-immigration rhetoric, reinforcement of state exclusionary practices, and neoliberal reliance on Chicano immigration labor uniquely position the state's stance on race (Banks, 2012; Jensen, 2013). The conservative political infrastructure fostered a governing body that aggressively targeted the budding Arizona ethnic studies movement in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD). Numerous attacks from conservative elected officials at the local and state levels highlighted the precarious nature of race held in the public forum regarding public K-12 education across the state. The following highlights instances in local, state, and national media where the discourse that structured anti-ethnic studies sentiment transpired. Three overarching themes that emerged from exploring media include the following: (1) anxieties around the negative portrayal of America through calls for abolishing systems; (2) belief that a culturally responsive curriculum

fosters racial division amongst youth by individually acknowledging their cultural and ethnic genealogies; and (3) race-neutral rhetoric that recenters whiteness as the dominant narrative in the classroom (Cabrera et al., 2013; Dotts, 2015; Duncan-Andrade, 2014; Romero, 2010).

Arizona's ethnic studies policy backlash was propelled most intensely by Arizona's State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne. Horne constructed House Bill (HB) 2281 in response to the implementation of a Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in the TUSD during the early 2000s. His motivation for this legislation came after activist Dolores Huerta stated that "Republicans hate Latinos" at a talk delivered at Tucson High School (Horne, 2007; Jensen, 2013). Horne responded by sending his Republican deputy Margaret Garcia Dugan (a Latina identifying woman) to Tucson High school, where young people met her by turning their backs, lifting their fists into the air during her speech, and walking out (Fernandez, 2012; Horne, 2007; Jensen, 2013). After this display, Horne penned an open letter calling for the dismantling of Ethnic Studies (and thus the MAS program) as it encouraged "defiance of authority" and created a "hostile atmosphere in the school for other students, who were not born into their race" (Horne, 2007). The legislative child of Horne, HB 2281, granted the Arizona State Superintendent of Public Instruction the ability to withhold funding from any district that utilizes a curriculum that engages in "promoting the overthrow of the United States Government" "promoting resentment toward a race or class of people," "are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group," and "advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals" (State of Arizona, 2010; Okihiro, 2010). Horne asserted that several teachers came forward and gave testimony that the MAS program taught students to hold "anti-Western" sentiment and to "rise up" in an interview following the passage of this legislation (Keyes, 2010).

This silencing legislation also held widespread support amongst the conservative political ranks in the state legislature. Arizona State Representative Steve Montenegro, a co-sponsor of HB 2281, voiced that his rationale behind bringing the bill stemmed from "textbooks they were using, some of them had violent material aimed at inciting violence against another race or class of people" (Fernandez, 2012). John Huppenthal, succeeding Arizona's State Superintendent of Public Instruction from Tom Horne (2011-2015), claimed that "The Mexican-American Studies classes use the same technique that Hitler used in his rise to power" and that "Tucson's public schools are illegally promoting ethnic solidarity and the overthrow of the U.S. government by teaching Mexican history and hip hop" (Planas, 2015, 2017). These public-facing opinions invoke the underlying ideology that engaging in a nonwhite centric curriculum champions the idea of violence and abolishing the American empire for racially minoritized students. As in the previous instance of multiculturalism, these conservative discourses construct ethnic studies as a folk devil, a looming menace to the white racial state. In so doing, conservative politicians advance a project of white epistemological capture. In other words, the advocating for race-neutral rhetoric in the classroom recenters whiteness as the dominant narrative as white hegemonic norms construct the classroom space with the omission of racially minoritized knowledge.

Another strand of conservative thought present across the Ethnic Studies ban is the claim of racial divisiveness encouraged by MAS. Arizona State representative Steve Montenegro shared that Ethnic Studies "promotes an atmosphere or a mentality of 'us versus them,' a minority versus a white culture...It's teaching certain students to be victims because of their race, because of their gender or because of their ethnicity" (Snyer, 2010). Tom Horne adds to this rhetoric by claiming that "...the [Mexican American Studies] course was presented in a racist manner and violated the other prohibitions pushing ethnic solidarity versus treatment of kids as individuals" and that this curricular construction "...divided students by race. African American students to classroom 1,

Mexican American students to classroom 2, etc., just like in the old south" (Horne, 2021). By framing ethnic studies in this light, these political actors actively engage in the stifling of counter-narratives found throughout the MAS curriculum and creating distorted projections of the folk devil. One should note, despite the rhetoric of conservative leaders, ethnic studies classes were open to all students in TUSD.

The primary aim of Tom Horne and other supporters of HB 2281 was not the blockage of teaching about Chicano culture but to stifle discussions around race and power in America (Cammarota, 2017; Dotts, 2015; Orozco, 2012). This intentionality around omitting spaces for race dialogue is not unique to Ethnic Studies but draws parallels to the current Critical Race Theory discourse. Critical Race Theory faces the same specter of white supremacy (race-neutral rhetoric, misinformation campaigns of racial division, and anti-American framings) highlighted by exploring Arizona's Ethnic Studies movement. The pushback against Ethnic Studies and MAS joins the greater conversation of social justice-orientated ideologies (i.e., Critical Race Theory) facing backlash from conservative pundits across the spectrum regarding K-12 education (Romero, 2010). Tom Horne's reemergence as a Superintendent of Public Instruction candidate in Arizona's 2022 primary illuminates this phenomenon as his campaign centers on "creating a hotline to report instruction on critical race theory" (Kunichoff, 2022).

These censoring ideologies hold similar threads of invoking white supremacist rhetoric from antagonists at the local, state, and federal levels. This attempt at recentralizing whiteness as the dominant narrative in the classroom actively dismisses the perspective that racially minoritized youth hold in their learning while simultaneously limiting conversations on whiteness (Duncan-Andrade, 2014). Youth explicitly expressed joy in the culturally relevant curriculum present in the Ethnic studies program that acknowledges who they are and represents them (Delgado, 2013; Gershon, 2017). Consequently, young people showcased their resistance to censoring legislation by engaging in walkouts as a form of resistance (Cabrera et al., 2013; Cabrera et al., 2011; Jensen, 2013). The tension between K-12 education's white supremacist roots and the voices of racially minoritized youth place the classroom as a site of political struggle for all.

Understanding the Bans within the Context of White Supremacy

The past efforts to ban and undermine multiculturalism and ethnic studies mirrors current mobilizations to ban or outlaw critical race theory. This paper was interested in highlighting not how resistance to multiculturalism or ethnic studies sets the stage for our current crisis, but rather how counter-hegemonic knowledges put whiteness into crisis and activates its long foundational practice of white epistemological capture; how the notion of the folk devil is a reoccurring strategic figure that is deployed for the purposes of whiteness. Critically, the desire for ahistorical, distorted accounts of the past, the recentering of whiteness, and the conjuring of the folk devil speaks more to the insidiousness of whiteness than critical race theory—or conjoined equity-centered discourses. Almost any analysis of power, inequity, and difference provokes a type of racial hysteria among whites committed to white epistemological capture and the larger project of white supremacy. The racial hysteria around critical race theory indexes how white supremacy aims to maintain and reproduce itself, as it has done time and time again.

The preservation of white supremacy partly hinges on what philosopher Charles Mills (1997) has framed as a "consensual hallucination" held by those committed to white supremacy through purposeful collective amnesia and distortion. We see this as part of the larger project of white epistemological capture. For Mills what is occurring is a type of enshrining of a collective

and structurally mandated inverted epistemology. Mills remarks in reference to these inverted epistemologies,

[o]ne has an agreement to *misinterpret* the world. One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority...[p]art of what it requires to achieve Whiteness...is a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities...There will be white mythologies...One could say then, as a general rule, that *white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters* related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement. (p. 18-19)

Mills' theorization regarding the role of white inverted epistemologies lays bare the logics of current and past legislation that seeks to actively advance and institutionalize white epistemological capture. By codifying within law and policy such illogics, white epistemological capture sets the stage for a host of material and structural violences.

Additionally, CRT is instructive here in further understanding the bans against it and similar counterhegemonic thought. Central to critical race theory is the notion of the permanence of racism. Advanced by Derrick Bell (1992) and other scholars, the permanence of racism speaks to the durability of racism and its perennial, morphic, and predictable nature (Henry, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2022). It suggests that racism is normal, not aberrant. The historical record affirms the twinned practices of creating the folk devil and white epistemological capture as central to the preservation of whiteness. Bans against CRT, ethnic studies, multiculturalism, and truth are normal, not aberrant; this is the realism of racism.

Relatedly, the construct of whiteness as property aids in our analysis of efforts to ban the freedom of ideas and historical accuracy. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) in their groundbreaking article on critical race theory discuss the role of property as a central governing concept in U.S. jurisprudence. Moreover, they draw on the work of legal scholar Cheryl Harris and her discussion of how whiteness morphs into the ultimate form of property. Harris (1993) states, "possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property—was defined to include only the cultural practices of Whites" (p.1721). Critically, Harris' work illuminates the ways whiteness reinscribes and reproduces its power. While Harris notes the many functions of whiteness, three seem most relevant here (a) the right to use and enjoyment, (b) the absolute right to exclude, and (c) the reputation and status property.

Current anti-truth legislation aims to distort the sordid and painful realities of white supremacy and remove the perspectives and histories of communities of color. Using and enjoying whiteness allows for whites to deploy their power and privilege to craft schooling and curriculum to be privy to and property of whiteness. Relatedly, Harris reminds us that the juridical and social functions of whiteness are to exclude and subjugate. It seems most clear that the curriculum understood as white by conservatives must exclude authentic narratives that are critical of the legacy of white power and white horrors. Such narratives puncture the drag of white innocence and coded patriotism that silences truth and wars with people of color. As such, to possess and enjoy schooling under the terms of whiteness necessitates the reputation of whiteness remains innocent and pristine. The "psychic" and epistemological comfort of whiteness is privileged to the chagrin of truth and to the mockery of those who live, suffer, and die under white supremacy. Ultimately, whiteness demands that the tainting of "endarkened knowledges" (Dillard, 2010) not diminish its

reputation or status. Whiteness as property illuminates how white supremacy has contorted or abandoned truth via white epistemological capture and locates the curriculum as a site for the continual recalibration of the state towards whiteness and the cohering of a normative, innocent white identity. Moreover, the folk devil of emancipatory or counter-hegemonic thought—be it multiculturalism, ethnic studies, or critical race theory—is sacrificed to white anger and disgust.

Coda

The current attacks on critical race theory and other equity related discourses illuminate white supremacists' efforts to conjure the folk devil. These efforts, often under the guise of a moral panic, are part of a longer history of curricular erasure and white epistemological capture. Advocates of white epistemological capture eschew curriculum that disturbs a normative, innocent white identity. In doing so, they advocate for a curriculum based on distortion and psychic safety.

Those committed to educational justice must work to ensure an education that is in the interest of truth and that denounces white supremacy. One must understand that white epistemological capture is a concerted movement among a large network of those committed to proffering an inverted epistemology. Researchers committed to exposing the violence of white supremacy might explore the various shapes of white epistemological capture embedded within the educational enterprise. Here, we explore white epistemological capture in curriculum, traces of it can be found in school discipline, market-based reforms, school funding decisions, and a host of other education policies. Further research might also expand on our conceptualization of white epistemological capture.

We do not want to underemphasize the significance of mobilizing. Grassroots resistance against white epistemological capture must be large-scale and movement based. Working across local, state, and national domains, a cross-sector of actors must speak against unjust policies and legislation, mobilizing both within and outside traditional educational domains. Unjust policies have material implications on schools generally and the day-to-day lives of educators (Jenkins, 2018, 2020). Thus, part of this mobilization is supporting educators and districts committed to educational justice. The mobilizing done in Indiana is a testament to the importance of building a movement to resist white supremacy. Although Indiana has been considered a conservative state, a coalition of educators, parents, and community members defeated SB 167 and HB 1134, which were conservative iterations of “Anti-CRT”/anti-truth bills. We can learn much from cases such as this.

Additionally, we must build spaces and institutions, as those who came before us did, that are committed to educational justice and truth telling. There already are organizations such as the Abolitionist Teaching Network, the Black Youth Project 100, and Rethinking Schools doing consequential work in this area. The African American Policy Forum (AAPF)'s #TruthBeTold Campaign aims to resist anti-truth legislation. It provides resources and strategies for individuals and communities committed to democracy and truth. Moreover, while electoral politics has a troubling history and is often mired in its own limitations, we must also be ambidextrous in our dealings with the hydra of white supremacy. School boards, state and local offices, federal elections all matter inasmuch as we support and fight for candidates with a progressive and transformative vision for education. Lastly, scholars of education must work with districts and grass roots organizations to do the necessary work of the here and now. How might we be of service to projects of justice?

While the aforementioned approaches are necessarily partial and limited, they are concerted efforts we can take to combat these injustices. We are in a struggle that has a long and arduous history. Some would rather we not know that history. But we are reminded of the words from New Orleans poet, activist, and educator Sunni Patterson: “no matter how treacherous/ they’ll try to trap us in them trenches, they’ll dig deeper/ ditches/ but all that matters is this: which side will we pick? Which path will we choose.”

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“That Sounds Scary, Let’s Ban It:” Analyzing Manufactured Ignorance & the Attack on Critical Race Theory in K-12 Schools

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Abstract

As of February 2023, 44 states have either introduced or passed legislation that aims to control the teaching of race in K-12 public schools. Using political discourse analysis, we investigate the discourse from six “anti-CRT” documents. We frame the discourse from an agnotological perspective; agnotology is the study of how ignorance is manufactured. Given that political discourse is one-directional, politicians have the unique position of actively constructing ignorance if they are providing information for the purpose of being consumed rather than argued or deliberated. We illustrate how the misuse of words/concepts as well as the distribution of disinformation contributes to manufactured ignorance. Finally, we argue that the deliberate and willful silence about systemic oppression will maintain white supremacy. Our intention is to challenge manufactured ignorance especially as it relates to how race and racism are discussed and taught in K-12 education.

Keywords: *agnotology, ignorance, critical race theory, political discourse analysis*

This paper examines recent attacks on critical race theory (CRT) to understand how political discourse around the inherent dangers of CRT manufactures ignorance in an attempt to maintain hegemony and white supremacy.¹ CRT posits that racism is endemic to American life and embedded in institutions like laws and schools (Delgado, 1988). CRT investigates/exposes systemic racism instead of focusing on individual racist acts and has become the new buzz word for conservative politicians to focus their attacks. With so much misinformation circulating, we sought to identify the discourse used in recent legislation. Since both authors teach in the state of Georgia, after reviewing political discourse on the federal level, we focus on Georgia with the recognition that similar attacks are happening across the nation.

Knowledge about CRT and white supremacy is being silenced in an effort to discredit decades of scholarship, civil rights progress, and the documented experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). If legislation can silence discussions of race/racism, then this country can continue to lie about its true origins in an effort to ignore potential economic and land reparations. James Baldwin (1998) noted white people, especially, “cling” to lies about whiteness in history because they are invested in controlling the narrative. Using political discourse analysis,

1. We recognize that the “attack on critical race theory” is not necessarily an attack on critical race theory. It is instead, an attack on anti-racism, equality, and equity in an attempt to keep whiteness centered and keep white supremacy alive. However, for the general flow of the paper, and because the media uses the term CRT, we will use this to denote the fact that this attack is an attempt at protecting white supremacy.

we seek to uncover how this discourse manufactures ignorance through misuse of terminology, censorship, and the pursuit of a colorblind ideology.

Context of the Attack on CRT

On May 20, 2021, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, tweeted: “Today, I wrote a letter to the State Board of Education opposing critical race theory (CRT) in our schools. This divisive, anti-American agenda has no place in Georgia classrooms” (Kemp, 2021). Calling CRT concepts divisive functions as a lie about this country’s founding (Baldwin, 1955). Kemp purposefully names CRT as anti-American, but this juxtaposition necessitates that people accept the origin story of the U.S. as one that is free from influence of white supremacy. As we saw from the backlash of Hannah Jones’ (2021) 1619 project, the origin story taught in U.S. schools is already divisive. As Hawkman and Diem (2022) argue:

The origin story of the United States, and therefore of “Americans,” is crafted to shield the influence of white supremacy, establishing a national foundation that is based on lies... Because of the pervasive nature of these lies within the schools and society, generations of people are conditioned to simultaneously accept them as truth and see any opposition to these lies as radical or extreme. (p. 3)

However, Representative Brad Thomas has gone on record stating that CRT is anti-American and it, along with the 1619 project are “being forced on our children by rogue teachers and radical school boards” (AllOnGeorgia, 2022).

Kemp is not alone in this attempt to ban CRT (or other anti-racism concepts); according to edWeek’s *Map: Where Critical Race Theory is Under Attack*, as of February, 2023 forty-four states have introduced legislation to limit the theory’s use in education.² The models for these “anti-CRT” bills continue to churn out of conservative think tanks like the Manhattan Institute, America First Policy Institute, and the Heritage Foundation (Schwartz, 2021).

The anti-CRT bills promote a colorblind ideology which suggests that race no longer matters and has no effect on one’s life outcomes (Bonilla Silva, 2003/2010). These bills also don’t recognize that schools currently teach a colorblind version of the founding of our country, and often neglected in the origin story of the United States is colonialism, the genocide of indigenous peoples, as well as an honest examination of slavery. “By disavowing colonialism, U.S. narratives of liberalism re-anchored the objectivity of liberal juridical and cultural regimes in that distanced space through a focused amnesia” (Sheth, 2022, p.5). Controlling the narrative in our schools allows the general public to collectively “forget” the painful truth of our past. This amnesia combined with a colorblind ideology “has become a formidable political tool for the maintenance of the racial order” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003/2010, p. 3). The attack on CRT is just one of the latest attempts to use colorblind ideology as rationale for maintaining the white status quo. However, we know race is endemic to society from centuries of documented racial exclusion, oppression, and discrimination. As noted by historian Ibram X. Kendi (2017), slaveholders considered “African people to be stamped from the beginning as a racially distinct people, as lower than themselves, and as lower in the scale of being than the more populous White indentured servants” (p. 38). That stamp marking Black people as the bottom rung on the hierarchy of race is deeply rooted in U.S. life and embedded in the policies that govern society; this is what CRT aims to understand.

2. edWeek’s *Map: Where Critical Race Theory is Under Attack* was last updated February 16, 2023.

As mentioned in our earlier footnote, the recent conservative discourse around race, and most especially CRT, indicates the attack is not on CRT itself, but an attack on historically accurate discussions of race and the role of white privilege in America. The attack on CRT strategically manufactures ignorance through legislation that further cements white hegemonic control. Carol Anderson (2016) calls this type of political work *white rage*, which is “not about visible violence, but rather works its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies [in order to] achieve its ends far more effectively, far more destructively” (p. 3). The ongoing maintenance of this colorblind propaganda is a strategic ploy to manipulate what people understand about systemic racism. Proctor and Schiebinger (2008) define *ignorance as a strategic ploy* as ignorance that has been actively produced and manipulated. The conservative agenda is actively manufacturing ignorance through both the misuse of CRT and the promotion of a colorblind ideology.

What is Critical Race Theory?

CRT is a theoretical tool to analyze policy and solve problems. It was originally used as a way of understanding how the U.S. legal system maintains inequalities and oppression (Crenshaw, 2002). It highlights the ways in which race structures our lives and exerts material consequences (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As a theoretical framework, CRT has certain tenets that enable us to apply the theory in analysis. Inherent in a critical race understanding of the world is recognition that white supremacy exists. In fact, white supremacy has been accepted as an innate component in the hierarchical social system within the U.S. (Calmore, 1997). Instead of seeing white supremacy as acts of violence perpetrated by individuals or, collectively, by groups such as the Klu Klux Klan, CRT recognizes white supremacy as “the operation of forces that saturate the everyday mundane actions and policies which shape the world in the interests of white people” (Gillborn, 2010, p. 84). While CRT itself is not taught in K-12 schools, evidence of white supremacy is evident when CRT is utilized to analyze education policies.³

The political actors leading the CRT attack are weaponizing the theory by claiming it creates divisiveness in society because it makes white people feel bad about themselves. Cheryl Matias, who has studied white emotionalities at length, has explained:

It is precisely those very emotionalities that shut down the potential for racial understanding. I understand that it may seem tough to understand one was born into a system wrought with racial power and privilege, but the discomfort in learning just how that power and privilege impacts people of color does not parallel how people of color must survive under it. (2020, p. 5-6)

Matias (2016) argues further that white emotionalities are ridden with issues of power, control, and hegemony and can be weaponized in ways that hurt people of color. Using CRT as a weapon allows whiteness to remain centered (Leonardo, 2004) and neglects one of the basic tenets of the theory- that racism does more damage at the institutional level than the personal level.

3. For examples of how CRT is used in education research see: Ladson-Billings (1998), Annamma & Morrison (2018); Harrison (2016); and Sandals (2020). In these examples, CRT investigates and exposes systemic racism in education policies instead of a focus on individual racist acts.

Political Discourse Analysis

We used Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) to analyze the language used in political statements and legislative action to illustrate how the discourse among conservative political actors is manufacturing ignorance. PDA examines nuanced context of political language. For example, in many instances, political discourse is one-directional, meaning information is presented by the political actor and received by the public (van Dijk, 1997). This could lead to manufactured ignorance if politicians provide information for the purpose of being consumed rather than argued or deliberated. Subject matter experts are unable to engage directly and immediately with the discourse, leaving the general public vulnerable to disinformation. PDA aims to investigate the representation, functions, and implications of political arguments (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). We analyzed six documents in chronological order to show how the discourse evolved over time.⁴

Situating PDA and CRT Within Agnotology

We frame our analysis of the political discourse from an agnotological perspective. Agnotology is the study of how ignorance is manufactured (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008). Studies in the field of ignorance are limited, but it is a field that is gradually growing, and there are a number of scholars who have recently contributed to the emerging canon dedicated to ignorance studies (Tuana, 2008, Croissant, 2014; Gross, 2007; and Mills, 1997 and 2007). Charles Mills (1997, 2007) characterizes ignorance as an inverted epistemology and identifies ignorance in terms of both false beliefs and absence of true belief. He examines the theory of white ignorance and determines that the delusion white people have about white supremacy maintains structures of hegemony. Any action that disrupts the equilibrium of white ignorance will likely meet resistance and challenge. Sheth (2022) explains that these “are challenges to the long-standing received and unchallenged authority of American imperialism and settler-colonialism” (p.3). Under these new anti-CRT laws, educators will be forced into a position where they must choose to censor their lessons and restrict conversations about race and white privilege, or face potential repercussions.

Proctor identified three categories of manufactured ignorance: ignorance as a native state, ignorance as a lost realm, and ignorance as a strategic ploy. For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on ignorance as a strategic ploy (ignorance that is created through deliberate actions). We were interested in understanding how the attack on CRT went from a whistleblower report about a federal diversity training to full blown hysteria that our children were being indoctrinated with evil ideas in public schools. To understand this, we identified how the hysteria led to misuse of terminology which then manufactured ignorance. The implication is that schools and teachers will be forced into censorship and the curriculum will further indoctrinate a colorblind ideology.

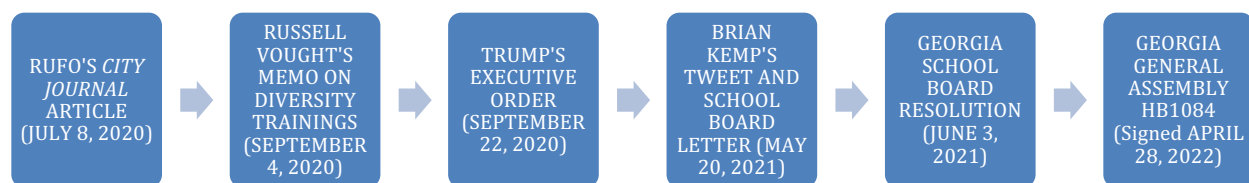
Croissant (2014) recognizes that there is value in framing the characteristics, or attributes, one might find within ignorance studies. Her typology of ignorance studies includes the following categories: chronicity, scale, intention, and granularity. Chronicity refers to the problem of manufactured ignorance as chronic and what happened over time to activate the ploy. Understanding the scale helps identify the origin, reach, and consequences of ignorance. The chronicity and

4. The following documents were used for this analysis: a report by Christopher Rufo; the White House memorandum on Training in the Federal Government, by Russell Vought; the Trump Executive Order 13950: Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping; the letter and Tweet sent by Governor Brian Kemp to the Georgia State Board of Education; the June 3, 2021 Georgia State Board of Education Resolution; and finally, the divisive concepts bill signed by Governor Kemp, HB1084.

scale in our study recognizes that ignorance was produced over time, through a series of local, state, and federal political statements and legislative action that directly impacts K-12 teachers. Granularity tells us whether the knowledge that is being censored is either concrete (high granularity) or theoretical (low granularity) (Croissant, 2014). Because CRT is theoretical knowledge, the conservative agenda intentionally exploits the granularity of information by manipulating the discourse to silence the conversation about race to protect fragile white egos.

Analyzing the Documents

Given that many states are now engaging in culture wars with an attack on CRT and systemic racism, after we look at the background and federal discourse, we will focus on state level actions taken Georgia. The timeline of documents we analyze is as follows:



The introduction of anti-CRT legislation reached a fevered pitch during the 2022 legislative session, and much of the language in these policies can be directly linked to the executive order implemented by the Trump administration in September of 2020. However, the words “critical race theory” are nowhere to be found in this executive order even though the legislation is often dubbed in the media as anti-CRT legislation. To find the origin of why CRT became entangled with the legislative orders, we begin with conservative journalist Christopher Rufo who eventually appeared on Tucker Carlson’s show to sound the alarm about critical race theory.⁵

The Rufo Effect: From the Whistleblower to the Whitehouse

Citing what Rufo calls a set of whistleblower documents that he obtained from an anonymous source, he claims that CRT has spread rapidly through the federal government (Rufo, July 18, 2020). The documents were allegedly distributed during a federal diversity training conducted by Cook Ross Inc, a leading Diversity and Inclusion consultancy. Here is one example of Rufo’s interpretation of the training provided from the whistleblower documents along with the original language:

5. Christopher Rufo is currently a Senior Fellow at the conservative think tank, Manhattan Institute. In 2018, he ran an unsuccessful campaign for city council in Seattle. Rufo appeared on Fox News’ *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, a show former President Donald Trump appeared for interviews and reportedly watched regularly, on September 2, 2020.

| Rufo's Interpretation: | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>The training begins with the premise that “virtually all White people contribute to racism” and have internalized “fairly consistent narratives about race” that “don’t support the dismantling of racist institutions.” Therefore, the trainers argue, white federal employees must “struggle to own their racism” and “invest in race-based growth.” “White managers” are asked to create “safe spaces” where black employees can explain “what it means to be Black” and be “seen in their pain.” White employees are instructed to “provide unconditional solidarity,” remain silent, and “sit in the discomfort” of their own racism. If any conflicts arise, the trainers insist that whites “don’t get to decide when someone is being too emotional, too rash, [or] too mean” and cannot protest if a person of color “responds to their oppression in a way [they] don’t like.”</p> | | |
| <p>It is imperative at this time that people who are White invest in race-based growth and development on topics such as systemic racism, civil rights history, unconscious bias, inclusion, and contemporary ideology such as anti-racism, intersectionality, White privilege, and White fragility. (Udarta Consulting, p. 22)</p> | <p>Don't shy away from language like "whiteness," "racism," "white supremacy" and "allyship." There was a time when education, talks, and references to these topics might have been seen as inflammatory, or generating negative responses, especially from White people. Our times now are requiring us to sit in the discomfort that these notions could cause, and to be willing to address our own growth and responsibility. (Udarta Consulting, p. 19)</p> | <p>Provide unconditional solidarity. That does not mean "I'd be on your side if you didn't act so angry" (e.g.). You don't get to decide when someone is being too emotional, too rash, too mean, or otherwise "undeserving of your support." Your allyship is not a favor that you can retract when someone responds to their oppression in a way you don't like. You just have to be there. (Udarta Consulting, p. 29)</p> |

Rufo’s interpretation cherry picks phrases from the training documents and distorts the message by rearranging the language.⁶ For example, in the diversity training documents obtained by Rufo, under a section labeled *How to be an Ally*, it notes that to be an ally, a white person needs to provide “unconditional solidarity” which means “you don’t get to decide when someone is being too emotional, too rash, [too] mean, or otherwise undeserving of your support” (Udarta Consulting, LLC document as cited in Rufo, July 15, 2020). Rufo selected the words “unconditional solidarity” and filled in his own blank with the idea that white people were instructed to “remain silent.” Rather, the diversity training materials point out that white people may feel the need to fill silence with their own commentary, and, instead, suggest white people should listen more and refrain from centering themselves in conversations about Black experiences. Whether one agrees with the advice in the pamphlet is not the point here, the point is that Rufo manipulated the context and the language to conform to his agenda of targeting social justice advocates.

At the end of Rufo’s article, he calls on Trump to issue an executive order “banning federal agencies from teaching the toxic principles of critical race theory, race essentialism, and neo-segregationism” and warns “the public should brace for a long war against the diversity-industrial complex and its enablers” (Rufo, 2020, para. 9). Shortly after Rufo’s call to action, Russell Vought, former director of the Office of Management and Budget under former President Donald Trump, issued an official memo on September 4th, 2020 claiming that diversity trainings cost millions of taxpayer dollars and are “divisive, anti-American propaganda.”

The memo notes that press reports (i.e. Rufo’s article) indicate that government employees attended trainings where they learned that white people benefit from racism. He repeats that these diversity trainings are “un-American propaganda” and they are “divisive.” Vought’s memo (2020) directs “all agencies [to] begin to identify all contracts or other agency spending related to any

6. We would like to note that it is entirely possible there were more documents distributed or presented during the training, but only one such document is linked in Rufo’s July 15, 2020 article. The documents are embedded in Rufo’s article, Udarta Consulting, LLC is identified as the creator of the documents.

training on “critical race theory,” “white privilege,” or any other training or propaganda effort that teaches or suggest either (1) that the United States is an inherently racist or evil country or (2) that any race or ethnicity is inherently racist or evil” (para. 4).

Two months following the alleged whistleblower documents from Rufo and only a few weeks after the memo was released by Vought, former President Donald Trump signed an executive order titled *Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping*. The purpose of the executive order was to “promote unity in the Federal workforce, and to combat offensive and anti-American race and sex stereotyping and scapegoating” (Executive Order No. 13950, 2020) It is important to note that the phrase critical race theory is not used directly in the executive order, rather it just refers to an unidentified “destructive” and “malign ideology.” The executive order is not directed towards education policy, rather it is for any federal contractors, Uniformed Services, federal grant recipients, and executive departments and agencies, which could include public schools.⁷

The terminology in the memo and the executive order manufactures ignorance about the reality of racism in the U.S. by sowing doubt and stirring up fear. By calling discussions about race anti-American, propaganda, divisive, destructive and malign, someone who is otherwise uninformed could become afraid that some kind of evil indoctrination was happening at the federal level.

Georgia Governor Brian Kemp Tweets a Letter

The executive order signed by Trump did not last long. On January 20, 2021, newly inaugurated President Joe Biden revoked the order leaving it up to individual states to pass similar legislation. In May 2021, Governor Brian Kemp published a letter on Twitter, that urged the Georgia State Board of Education to “take immediate steps to ensure that Critical Race Theory and its dangerous ideology do not take root in our state standards or curriculum.” In the letter, Kemp calls CRT “divisive,” “anti-American,” and “dangerous ideology.”⁸ Kemp’s letter incited fear in the public’s imagination about what was being taught in Georgia’s K-12 public schools. Kemp’s discourse was strategically used to deceive the public about the curriculum. CRT is a theoretical tool known to CRT scholars in higher education and is not a standard in the K-12 public school curriculum in Georgia. Using this terminology is a deceptive ploy designed to shift the focus from talking about issues of racism and oppression and incite fear that children are being indoctrinated with anti-American ideologies.

7. In November of 2020, Trump signed another Executive Order to establish the 1776 Commission to combat the perceived attacks on founding principles and core American values related to race. They were formed as an advisory commission under the Department of Education. Their report was to inform curriculum policy regarding history and civics education to “enable a rising generation to understand the history and principles of the founding of the United States in 1776 and to strive to form a more perfect Union.” The 1776 Commission report was released on January 18, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 2021. Two days later, Joe Biden dissolved the commission and their report was archived. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/11/05/2020-24793/establishing-the-presidents-advisory-1776-commission>

8. For those living outside of the state of Georgia, know that this is the same person who, in a campaign commercial during his run for governor in 2020, held a shotgun aimed at a teenage boy who planned to take Kemp’s daughter to prom (CNNPolitics, 2018). This commercial glorified gun violence and misogyny and was certainly more divisive than a theory that can help us solve the nation’s widespread racism problem.

Georgia State Board of Education Resolution

Following Kemp's letter, the Georgia State Board of Education passed a resolution (11-2) limiting discussions about race in K-12 classrooms. The resolution was copied from "The Partnership out of Civics Act" authored by a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center (Tagami, 2021). The resolution (Jones, 2021) states they believe "the United States of America is not a racist country, and that the state of Georgia is not a racist state (para. 2)." Naming this in a resolution does not make it a fact. The U.S. as a country and the state of Georgia, in particular, are indeed racist. There is systemic racism in terms of disparities in quality education, differences in sentencing for crimes, as well as major health disparities. However, there are also individual acts of racism and racial violence perpetrated on a daily basis. We can look back at history to the Race Riot of 1906 and the lynching of two Black couples in 1946 or, even modern-day violence such as the racially motivated killing of Ahmaud Arbery. One of the author's Black children attends high school in Georgia with a white boy who filmed himself holding a gun and invoking racial terror by referring to killing Black people whom he referred to with the N word. This video surfaced immediately after two other videos of white students from the same school saying the N word. To declare that the state of Georgia is not a racist state is a slap in the face to BIPOC who regularly deal with racial violence. Conservatives can try to declare something as the truth but, again, they are not the only arbiters of the truth and nor should they be.

The resolution continues that schools should not teach that anyone is "inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive" and also that no one should be made to feel bad for past acts perpetrated by people of a similar race or gender (Jones, 2021, para. 3). It states that no one should feel "discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex" (Jones, 2021, para. 3). Again, the intent here is to protect fragile white egos at the expense of BIPOC experiences. White students are able to position themselves as victims while the actual oppressive experiences of BIPOC are dismissed and ignored.

Georgia General Assembly Passes Divisive Concepts Bill

In April 2022, Kemp signed HB1084, otherwise known as the Protect Students First Act, into law. This bill undermines educators' abilities to teach about topics like systemic racism, slavery, and oppression. Educators and schools found in violation will face consequences. HB1084 prohibits teaching that the U.S. is a "systemically racist country" and incorporates some of the language from State Board of Education's resolution about not causing guilt or anguish. It requires that school districts create a complaint resolution process to address violation complaints and allow parents to approve curriculum materials. This bill clearly undermines teachers' professionalism and agency (Ravitch, 2016) but, further, the bill will silence necessary and important conversations about the founding of this country, whose work built and sustained the economy, and the ways in which white supremacy undergirds many of the laws that continue to govern us all.

Framing the Discourse Using Agnotology

Ignorance is being manufactured through the spread of disinformation about CRT which ultimately silences conversations about race, racism, and justice. Across the documents there is consistent use of incorrect and deceptive terminology. In correspondence with Benjamin Wallace-

Wells, contributing author to *The New Yorker*, Rufo recounts his rationale for selecting the term critical race theory:

We've needed new language for these issues. 'Political correctness' is a dated term and, more importantly, doesn't apply anymore. It's much more invasive than mere 'correctness,' which is a mechanism of social control, but not the heart of what's happening. The other frames are wrong, too: 'cancel culture' is a vacuous term and doesn't translate into a political program; 'woke' is a good epithet, but it's too broad, too terminal, too easily brushed aside. 'Critical race theory' is the perfect villain. (Wallace-Wells, 2021, para 6)

Along with employing CRT incorrectly, the political discourse tracing back to Rufo's article has consistently used terminology as disinformation. For something to qualify as disinformation, it must be perceived as inaccurate and as pursuing some kind of political gain (Tsang, 2021, p. 1061). Terms like *anti-American*, *evil*, *divisive*, *dangerous*, *propaganda*, *destructive*, *malign*, *offensive*, *racial scapegoating*, *indoctrination*, are just a sample of the deceptive language used across these documents. For example, Vought's use of the word *evil* in a memo about restricting federal monies to anti-racist training is a strategic ploy to distort the reality of what lessons about systemic racism are actually meant to teach. Concepts like white privilege denote that white people do not experience discrimination or mistreatment based on the color of their skin. This is not an *evil* or *divisive* idea; it is meant to help white people recognize their complicity in systemic racism.

The term that appears most often in anti-CRT political discourse is *divisiveness* as if discussing racism will lead to animosity and therefore divide the country. As educational scholars, we know that avoiding conversations about race leads to further racial tension and disparities (Cooper and Chizhik, 2015). When students deliberate social justice issues in the classroom, they are practicing a democratic function of American citizenship. They are employing their right to free-speech and they are discerning real societal problems with real solutions.

2022 was an election year, and the CRT debate has become a salient issue with increasing media attention. Governor Kemp applauded the efforts of anti-CRT lawmakers, and in his own bid to win the gubernatorial election in 2022, he actively stood by his support of any law that will end CRT in schools. Voters who heed the misleading political discourse as dogmatic principles are led to believe that systemic racism is a dangerous ideology and not a reality. These voters will be ignorant of the experiences of BIPOC and more likely to denounce policies that could help individuals who face oppression.

It is frustrating that CRT and systemic racism are labeled as ideologies yet the origin story anti-CRT politicians tell (that incidentally is full of lies and ideology) is automatically considered fact. Why do white people get to be the arbiters of fact and BIPOC's perspectives dismissed as "divisive" fiction? Despite a long and well documented body of scholarship from critical scholars, many white people want to pretend that systemic inequality does not exist. They know racism exists (i.e. this is not naivete on their part; it is more sinister and calculating) and, yet, they continue the masquerade. The lies we tell children about current U.S. history are full of mistruths and false representations regarding the true horrors that occurred. As students become more critical, they will recognize that the way history is taught continues to propagate misleading information. Instead of being honest about their motives, anti-CRT politicians lead people to fear CRT. As educators, we believe it is more divisive to continue to teach a curriculum that white washes history. It makes it seem as if the Indigenous gave up their land and welcomed in "pilgrims." This is the

colonial settler narrative that comforts white conservatives at night. The current curriculum also portrays slavery as a benevolent institution instead of the horrific institution it was with very little recognition of how the forced labor of so many people of the African diaspora actually made this country economically strong. Censoring and silencing historically accurate narratives will further manufacture ignorance in an effort to maintain hegemony and white supremacy.

Conclusion

The culture wars are not a new phenomenon and will continue as the federal and state governments, local districts, and neighborhood schools debate over how to teach what are labeled controversial issues (Apple, 2004). But, we must engage in these debates with the full recognition that education is already situated within a sociopolitical context. Teachers make decisions every day that are influenced by larger societal and political forces (Nieto & Bode, 1998). One cannot pretend that this is not occurring and, therefore, teachers are simply unable to just teach while ignoring the sociopolitical context that exists outside of the classroom. Students bring their own beliefs, ideas, and experiences to the classroom. For many BIPOC students, racism is real experience and they navigate it on a daily basis. Teachers cannot ignore that this is happening nor should they (Howard, 2003).

The current educational landscape we have analyzed in this paper illustrates that politics is constricting what is allowed to occur in the classroom. States and local school boards are overreaching to try to control curriculum and instruction in the name of misguided patriotism (Apple, 2011). By controlling curriculum and instruction, politicians are attempting to control what teachers, professionals in their own right, can do in the classroom. Apple (2013) notes that, “this regime of control is not based on trust, but on a deep suspicion of the motives and competence of teachers” (p. 43). We are left to wonder how politicians, who exhibit little to no knowledge of educational philosophy and pedagogy, let alone a thorough understanding of educational equity, are the ones driving this control of curriculum.

Sadly, this cultural moment, like the culture wars that predate this one, have been a long time coming. Trump’s political rise was due, in large part, to his embrace of white nationalists and his public endorsement of white supremacy. As scholars, we know that racism can only exist as long as white supremacy thrives. We also know that the Trump presidency showed many politicians that they can lie as long as they believe the lies themselves. These separate actions have coalesced to a moment in time when white supremacists can claim to be victims of divisive ideologies while spreading disinformation:

In this emboldened en/whitening moment, hate speech by White supremacists is wrongly considered free speech, Whiteness incorrectly presents itself as in need of civil protection, and willfully ignorant, ahistorical #alternativefacts reign supreme over historical reality. (Matias & Newlove, 2017, p. 926)

As former K-12 teachers and current higher education academicians, we will fight against this misguided force by calling on teachers and educational leaders to teach accurate history and have meaningful, honest conversations about what life is really like in this country. We cannot sit back ethically, morally, or professionally while our profession is taken over by pseudo-fascists who want to continue to exert their invisible power over the masses. Extolling colorblindness in this country will NOT cure racism. As Crenshaw notes, this attack on CRT and systemic racism is an

attempt that “would allow only for a “history” that holds no contemporary consequences; racism ended in the past, according to the developing backlash, and we would all be better off if we didn’t try to connect it to the present” (Crenshaw, 2021, para. 2). Racism is not a distant part of history; and white supremacy was, and still is, one of the founding principles of our nation. Denying this, or silencing these truths, will censor knowledge and continue to manufacture ignorance.

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“Apóyame o haste a un lado”: Composite Storytelling as Resistance During an anti-CRT Climate in Teacher Education¹

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Abstract

Recently we have seen a heightened public assault on critical race theory (CRT), anti-racist ideologies and practices, and on scholars, faculty, and activists who employ CRT in their work. In this article we draw upon CRT, Latina/Chicana feminism, and critical raced-gendered epistemology, to situate the experiences of Latina faculty in post-secondary education and provide an onto-theoretical framework to make sense of a composite narrative we collaboratively created: Dra. Rivera. We conclude by offering several suggestions for Colleges of Education and teacher education writ large.

Keywords: *Critical Race Theory, Post-Secondary Education, Latina Chicana Feminism, Composite Storytelling, Anti-Racist*

Introduction

Over the last year, we have seen a heightened public assault on critical race theory (CRT) and anti-racist ideologies and practices, especially for faculty and activists who employ CRT in their work (Cabrera et al., 2017; Matias et al. 2017). While white-supremist attacks are not new (Tensley, 2021), the current climate of anti-CRT bills and public protest has trickled up from the PK-12 setting where teachers are experiencing increased censorship and bans on any curriculum involving CRT (Morgan, 2022). This political tension against CRT impacts post-secondary institutions in a new, insidious way. Although universities proclaim missions for diversity and justice, institutions simultaneously subvert this aim by avoiding or working against mobilized efforts, grounded in CRT, to address issues like hostile campus climates for students and faculty of color. What happens, then, to faculty who do the work that academic institutions proclaim to want but then deny it through their (in)action? Furthermore, how do anti-racist faculty and Faculty of Color (FOC), navigate such an academic space? In response to these issues, we engage the methodology of composite storytelling (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005) to bring to light how academic institutions un/intentionally resist justice work and, influenced by the current anti-CRT sociopolitical landscape, even delegitimize and marginalize FOC whose work engages CRT. Here, we present a composite story of a fictional character, Dra. Angelina Rivera, a Latina faculty member in teacher education whose scholarship centers CRT. While she is consistently asked to further justice, she is also told to not go “too far” by invoking CRT perspectives.

1. We do not italicize words written in Spanish in response to language power dynamics. Not italicizing words written in Spanish addresses the privileging of English as the language of power.

Drawing from CRT, critical raced-gendered epistemology, and Latina/Chicana feminist theories, we use composite storytelling to pull the reader into Dra. Rivera's everyday experience to understand, even feel, what it is like navigating this contradiction of working toward racial justice while avoiding "too much" justice. These mixed messages take a toll, causing overwhelming stress, exhaustion, and racial battle fatigue (Kohli & Pizarro, 2022; Matias, 2020; Matias et.al., 2019). Understanding someone else's experience, in this case a critical-race Latina faculty member at a predominantly white institution (PWI), reveals the racialized landscape of academia.

Through storytelling (Bell, 1999; Khalifa, et.al, 2013) we seek to open up conversations and bring about solidarity. The stories in this piece affirm the experiences of FOC and lay a foundation of understanding for those who may have never experienced the racialized, hidden workings of academia that FOC grapple with on a daily basis. Grounded in the current anti-CRT context, these stories provide concrete examples that respond to the following questions: What's the problem? How are post-secondary institutions not supportive of FOC and justice work? With this structural opposition made visible, we then invite readers committed to CRT and anti-racism to dream of other possibilities—to invoke counterstories. While we pose our own suggestions, we also seek collaboration in addressing the questions: How can institutions better "apóyame o haste a un lado"¹ [support me or get out of the way]? How can institutions authentically join in solidarity with anti-racist faculty and students, rather than superficially subscribing to justice initiatives that only add unsustainable labor on the backs of FOC and, particularly, Women of Color (WOC) faculty (Gutiérrez, et al., 2012; Mizelle, 2006)? And how can all of this be done in the face of public, white-supremacist acts, such as calls to ban CRT and conversations about equity and justice in PK-12 schools.

Latina Faculty Experiences through a Critical Lens

For this article, we draw upon CRT, Latina/Chicana feminism, and critical raced-gendered epistemology to situate the experiences of Latina faculty in academia and provide an onto-theoretical framework to make sense of Dra. Rivera's story.

First, our work is guided by CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013), and LatCrit more specifically (Valdes 1996), to understand the structural components of race and racism that are embedded in society and academic institutions. From this combined perspective, social change requires identifying and dismantling institutionalized racism, as well as transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, p. 3). Building upon this, LatCrit takes up "a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 108). More specifically, LatCrit examines issues around language, colorism, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Paredes Scribner & Fernández, 2017), as well as gender inequities through the experiences of Latinas (Delgado Bernal, 2002). CRT and LatCrit also enable scholars to interrogate race-neutral laws and policies that differentially impact POC (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For example, promotion and tenure procedures may seem neutral and applicable to all faculty, however, in practice, the area of service can be interpreted in ways that disproportionately impacts faculty along the lines of race and gender since more service is often requested of FOC and women faculty (Kulp et al., 2019).

While CRT and LatCrit call attention to how racism is entrenched within institutional practices, Latina/Chicana feminism (Anzaldúa, 2007; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) hones into the introspective and personal side of what it looks like to navigate unjust and oppressive power structures in U.S. society and academia. Chicana feminists have long engaged

with “theory in the flesh” to generate knowledge from embodied and lived experiences (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Pitts et al., 2020). This not only produces knowledge about the experiences of Latinas and Chicanas, but it also reveals how systemic oppression works and what it takes to transform society.

Chicana/Latina feminism is an essential lens in making sense of Latina faculty’s experiences within the academy, particularly when WOC faculty are asked to do justice work while CRT is under attack in political discourse (Tensely, 2021). In general, women in the academy tend to experience service labor at higher rates compared to men (Jaschik, 2011); they are often expected to take on roles as caretakers and counselors, under the guise of “service,” while the same is not expected of men (Niemann, 2012). This impacts teaching evaluations (Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2020) and promotion and tenure (Kulp, Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2019) and is further exacerbated for WOC as they are often asked to serve on *diversity* committees, mentor Students or Color (SOC), lead affinity groups, teach their white colleagues about *equity issues* (Beeman, 2021; Tuitt, Hanna, et al., 2011), and engage in ghost advising (Schultheiss, 2018). According to Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006), the invisibility of emotional labor is rooted in the gendered, raced, and classed histories of education, framed as a natural extension of ‘women’s work.’ WOC must also navigate racist stereotypes and assumptions of Black and Brown women’s labor (Niemann, 2012) and experience microaggressions, including gendered-raced classroom interactions with students (Pittman, 2010), devaluation as scholars (Settles et al., 2021), and anti-Black misogynoir (Lewis & Miller, 2018).

Given the interconnections between race and gender in the experiences of WOC faculty, Delgado-Bernal (2002) argues for a critical raced-gendered epistemology that allows researchers to imagine how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality work together to shape individual experiences with intersecting forms of systemic oppression. Critical raced-gendered epistemologies also offer “unique ways of knowing and understanding the world based on the various raced and gendered experiences of people of color” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p. 107).

Using critical race-gendered epistemology, CRT, and Latina/Chicana feminism together, then, helps make sense of collective Latina faculty experiences that intersect with the current sociopolitical landscape in academia—specifically in the field of teacher education where faculty must now also grapple with and prepare their teacher candidates for increasing bans on CRT in PK-12 schools. Latina faculty and other FOC engage with all this while simultaneously navigating the unequal distribution of labor in academia, including more equity and justice work as universities seek to keep up appearance in the midst of public hypervisibility of racial injustice brought about by such events as George Floyd’s murder. While legislation seeks to ban CRT at the PK-12 level, Dra. Rivera’s stories demonstrate how anti-CRT sentiments are carried up into universities. Dra. Rivera’s composite stories, then, demonstrate how individual experiences support the racialized and gendered inner workings of academia—resulting in de facto CRT bans.

Composite Storytelling through Plática

To illuminate the multi-layered realities of navigating intersecting, hostile structures, further exacerbated by the current anti-CRT sociopolitical context within academia, we present three composite stories told through the lens of a fictional character, Dra. Angelina Rivera. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), composite storytelling is a particular practice of counterstorytelling:

Composite stories and narratives draw on various forms of ‘data’ to recount the racialized, sexualized, and class experiences of people of color. Such *counterstories* [emphasis added] may offer both biographical and autobiographical analysis because the authors create composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political situations to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination. (p. 33)

We constructed Dra. Rivera and her stories from our own experiences across institutions, the experiences of colleagues at other PWIs, and the stories reflected in scholarly literature. To facilitate this, we engaged a Latina/Chicana methodology called *plática* (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) [sessions of dialogue] to tell ours and others’ stories to both remember and make visible what it is like navigating academia in the present moment. Moreover, *plática* grants space to make sense of contradictions to reveal the structural racism and institutional limitations that serve as roadblocks for anti-racism and justice efforts.

We began *pláticas* with self-care through friendly and joyful conversation. Our conversations organically melded into discussions of navigating academia during the pandemic, attacks, and anxieties around the increasing anti-CRT climate in education. During conversations, one of us took notes. In our spirit of collectivity and care, we alternated leading as necessary. After initial meetings, we began analyzing our notes (i.e. data) to construct composite stories and then continued dialoguing to build upon one another’s stories.

By the end of our *pláticas*, we arrived at the overarching theme of “navigating contradictions on a daily basis,” summing up the core struggle of what it looks like working for racial justice and equity as critically-minded Latina faculty. Under this theme, we identified three specific contradictions which manifested into composite stories about Dra. Rivera:

- Contradiction 1: Recognition/misrecognition, Dra. Rivera is acknowledged but disrespected at the same time (i.e. microaggression of not being referred to as Dra. Rivera, while another is referred to formally as “Dr.” within the same conversation). Dra. Rivera wonders: “You’ll use my labor, but do you really care to know me?”
- Contradiction 2: Do the work, but don’t really do the work, Dra. Rivera wants to do justice work and is asked to do so at her university, but the requests seem superficial. Dra. Rivera wonders: “The work piles up, but are these requests really about justice?”
- Contradiction 3: Called in to be called out, Dra. Rivera engages with faculty and students to center justice through a CRT lens and offers ideas for institutional change. However, colleagues become uncomfortable and ask her to dial it back. Dra. Rivera wonders: “They ask me to do justice work, then say I’ve gone too far—that now I’m the problem?!”

Who is Dra. Rivera?

Dra. Rivera is a fictional character drawn from various Latina and WOC faculty, including ourselves, colleagues we know, and experiences shared in the scholarly literature about WOC faculty in academia. Dra. Rivera is a pre-tenure faculty in teacher education at a PWI. As a cisgender woman she recognizes expectations are situated in the intersections of gender, race, and other identities. As the first in her family to graduate with a college degree and as one of only three FOC within her department, she often struggles to bury the imposter syndrome she feels. Inspiration from her 10 years of working with predominately SOC in a San Diego classroom, and motivation

from her two children she single parents, carries into her work in the academy as she centers critical race scholarship and Black and Chicana feminism to bring about justice in education.

Below, we use composite storytelling to invite readers into Dra. Rivera's perspective. For example, we use italics to signify her internal dialogue. We hope that the many contradictions she experiences resonate with some to affirm their experiences, provide insight to others, and collectively unite us in (re)imagining a different reality—one in which Dra. Rivera and others like her are able to unapologetically thrive in the academy. We explore this imagined reality in later sections of the manuscript.

Composite Storytelling: Dra. Rivera

“My Name is Angelina.”: Recognition/Misrecognition

So many things on my mind today. I have to email the print shop to make sure the posters are ready for the conference...Oh yeah, I still need to meet with the Associate Dean to discuss cross-course scheduling... I just feel so overwhelmed with all my coordinator work...oh and...

“Angelina Glad I caught you. I need to run a few things by you.”

Interrupted again—a familiar occurrence. Chris Anderson, my department chair and yet another white male in a leadership position, is notorious for unscheduled meetings my time doesn't seem to matter. I have a ton of stuff to get to right now. My service load takes over my entire planner, but I'm cornered now.

“Hi, Chris. I was just on my way back to the office. I have a lot of pressing matters, but what's up?”

Unfazed, Chris jumps in, “I just got exciting news that the Business School wants to partner with the College of Education for diversity training! I think this could be huge for us in terms of opportunities AND our Faculty of Color can get their names out across campus!”

Woah what does he mean by “us?” Who is benefiting from “diversity training” here? I came here because the Dean said the university is committed to real change and anti-racism—and as a Man of Color, I felt he must be sincere—but now they just want mini talks on “diversity!” But talk about interest-convergence. Make it seem like it's about supporting and promoting FOC except in reality it's about making the college look good. But ok, let me calm down. He hasn't said anything about me just yet.

“Oh, ok, thanks for letting me know...” I stutter out looking for a way out of the conversation.

Chris continues, “Yeah, I think this would be a great opportunity for you to get more university service for your pre-tenure review. You're well positioned to take on such a role. This is in your wheelhouse as a Faculty of Color and with the research you do.”

MORE SERVICE??? I'm two weeks behind in grading, have 50 emails in my inbox, and that revise and resubmit is due at the end of the week. All I do is go to meetings and serve on committees. Yet here Chris corners me and positions me as the token Latina who does social justice

work. How can I possibly do more??? And what does he mean by the research that I do? This is exactly the kind of thing I critique.

Trying to veil my frustration I firmly respond, “I am actually committed to several other obligations right now, I don’t think it smart for...”

Just then, the Associate Dean approaches.

Pero, great! A way out—plus I’ve been trying to meet with her!

“Dr. Anderson...Hi, Angela...how are you both? I’ve been meaning to reach out to you, Angela, about the course schedule you asked about. And also, we have a photographer coming who wants to take some pictures of faculty and students to showcase the college and our social justice work—I told her you would be great.”

Wait. Did Dean Fairchild just call me Angela? She referred to Chris as “Dr. Anderson,” then tried to use my first name but got it wrong? And she wants me to be in ANOTHER promotion photo?? Now they’re just chatting casually. Well I’m going to at least tell her my name is not...

Abruptly Dean Fairchild turns, pats my arm and says, “Well, it was good running into you both. Angela, let’s schedule that photographer to come to your class!”

“Good seeing you Dean Fairchild. Let’s catch up at our kids’ soccer game this weekend!” Chris says, smiling as he walks away.

We never finished our conversation. If it could even be called a “conversation.” My concern over additional service? Dismissed. Yet they want to tokenize my brown body for diversity talks and photo shoots. I feel so dehumanized and infantilized. Just talked at...like I wasn’t even standing here. I tried to advocate for myself, but I am unheard. Worse...they don’t even know my name! I wish there was someone else who understood—someone I could talk to.

“It’s the Work You’re Here to do Right?”: Do the Work, but Don’t Really do the Work

Of course this meeting is going over. They always go over, but I can’t leave. Colleagues have already made comments about me leaving early or canceling for my kids. They don’t understand what it means to be a single-parent in a new space without a support system. So here I sit. And now I’ll be late picking up the kids from school. Again.

Chris’ voice interrupts my thoughts, “Thanks, Bob, for that outstanding presentation about your work to bring Students of Color into the program.”

Great. It’s over. Ten minutes late—if I leave now I can make it to the school as the last of the students are being picked up. Oh, great, here comes Bob.

Get ready to dodge another “social justice” service request. Yes, I am a LatCrit scholar, but I am not a puppet to parade around. But that’s asking for privileged people to understand complexities of racism, of symbolic and performative acts of social justice palatable to a white audience.

“Hey, Angelina, do you have a second?”

“Actually, Bob, I’m already late for my next appointment and gotta run.”

“This will be quick, I promise,” Bob assures. “First, I value your perspective during these meetings. Every time we talk about topics like this, I feel uncomfortable. I recognize my privilege as a white, tenured faculty and don’t want to overstep or say something that offends you—I mean people. So, there’s an ad hoc committee to collect data on the experiences of Students of Color in our program. It’s the work you’re here to do right? And it won’t require much. You can use a couple graduate Students of Color and host some focus groups. Then you can have 10 minutes of the next program meeting to present your findings and provide recommendations for supporting and bringing in Students of Color. Like I said, you can distribute this work to the grad students—they need this research experience. And you can develop this into some publications. We can talk about that later—I’d love to help you publish about this. Oh, and, I’ve been listening to you about the free labor asked of Faculty of Color and agree. So, I think I can secure \$300 in professional development funds for you. Let me know if you need help finding grad students!”

Wow. What... even... where do I start? Thank goodness I’m wearing a face mask. I mean, the audacity—asking me to take this on and also put the labor on grad Students of Color. When I advocated for a program, department, and college-level statement against acts of racism after George Floyd’s murder and for public admonishing of attacks on CRT, I was met with quick excuses as to why it would not be in the best interest of the college to publicly take a stand... we don’t want to anger potential funders and alumni. BUT it’s okay to ask—expect—me and Students of Color to take on all this extra emotional labor for a measly \$300 dollars in professional development funds—all so they can bring in more Students of Color into this hostile environment and have more photo ops?! Que me creen, una pendeja o que?

Yet, I’m stuck. I’m un-tenured and the only Faculty of Color in the program. And I am committed to humanizing spaces for our Students of Color. But why does it always have to fall on me?! Can’t they all see that I’m struggling to stay afloat. Even with the 1:2 pre-tenure teaching load I negotiated, I’m struggling. My communities are under attack. I’m trying to survive. Who am I kidding, the institution doesn’t care about me—they care about their interests. Their reputation. Their fundraising. They think they can stay “neutral” in the face of violent, perpetual attacks on historically marginalized communities—my communities—then turn around and use us? Ahhh the kids!!

“You Understand the Complexity of the Situation, Right?”: Called in to be Called Out

Well, that was a shitshow...The walk to my office could not happen fast enough after that awful program meeting. Our grad Students of Color conducted such an in-depth study and analysis of the BIPOC undergrad students in the program, only to have their work questioned, held suspect, and dismissed by most. I invested so much time into guiding the grad students and even met one-on-one with several students to talk through the emotional labor of listening to BIPOC undergrad experiences of feeling like outsiders. And this after the undergrads shared how much they valued the space, were really feeling heard and valued, and appreciated connection with a faculty member of color—something they said made them feel more like they belong. I was already overwhelmed and exhausted, and now I feel like my spirit has left my body. I just can’t...

There’s a knock at my door. I quickly put my mask on and say, “Come in.”

Bob and Chris stroll in.

Oh no...I can't take any more right now. What now?

Exchanging quick greetings, Bob begins the conversation, “Angelina, I’m amazed at how in-depth your grad students conducted their work with our undergraduate Students of Color. We can certainly do better as a program to be inclusive and help them feel more welcomed. But, I hear faculty’s concerns about whether it is practical and the best course of action to integrate CRT into the core of the program—especially when our teacher candidates are being told not to talk about race in their field placements. And we’ve already talked about how writing a statement as a program that denounces anti-CRT legislation may be too much and make other students or supporters feel uncomfortable.”

Chris chimes in, “Yeah, we agree CRT is central to justice work—and I think our faculty are actually doing this work—but we also have to consider other perspectives for the collective good. You understand the complexity, right?”

Under my face mask, I clench my jaw.

What does he expect me to say to this?!! The students and I worked tirelessly on this. We told the undergrads this was their chance to be heard. They want a public statement denouncing anti-CRT legislation. They demand more CRT and anti-racist curriculum. They want to deepen social justice teaching in the program. I did the work they asked, yet it is too much now? Too in-depth? Not in the interest of the collective good?

I respond, “Look, I just did what you asked me to do. The grad students and I provided the feedback you asked for from the undergrad students. Their demands and needs are clear.”

Chris shifts in his chair, “Let’s find a compromise. I just don’t want others to see you as not being collegial. That came up in last year’s review, you know. You have to be careful to not push your agenda so aggressively. How about you create a 30-minute workshop for our faculty to learn how to integrate anti-racist pedagogy in their classes? This will show our undergrad students we are working on their feedback. In regards to the statement, we can talk more about that later.”

WHAT?! They want more. Esto es un cuento de nunca acabar! My child is sick, I am already packed with meetings next week, I still haven’t completed that revise and resubmit, the emails have piled up more. And now, to make matters worse, I have formed all of these relationships with my Students of Color, and now I feel like I am failing them. Most of the faculty aren’t interested in another professional development, but at the same time, I’m accountable to my students. What do I do? Why me? I know why; who else will do it? ¿Que hago?! I’m carrying this on my back. ¡SOY UNA BURRA!! ¡YA NO PUEDO MÁS!!!!!!

Bob and Chris get up to leave, but as they do, Chris turns back to me, “Oh, and Angelina, we still need to talk about the opportunity with the Business School. Let’s schedule something.”

THAT’S IT!!!! NO MÁS!!! I need to act now. Here goes...¡Apóyame o haste a un lado!

Image 1. *Apóyame o haste a un lado*



Nuancing the Contradictions

Collectively, these composite stories and accompanying illustration (see Image 1) illuminate the insidious and oftentimes covert ways racist ideologies and practices exist and are perpetuated within academia. For instance, Dr. Rivera's encounter with the Associate Dean exposes the daily and persistent racial microaggressions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012) that FOC are often left to navigate. Dismissing and infantilizing her presence (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Puwar, 2004) while also misnaming Dra. Rivera reflect how institutional agents, in this case the Associate Dean of the College of Education, center their own whiteness and comfort (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). In this case, this meant referring to Angelina as Angela—a name that is perhaps more comfortable for an English linguistic palate. This moment allows Dra. Rivera to “articulate[s] [her] own realit[y] in dignified, wholesome, and culturally nuanced ways” (Khalifa, et.al, 2013, p. 494).

Moreover, Dra. Rivera and other CRT FOC, are forced to navigate, survive, and resist marginalizing and dehumanizing structures on a daily basis. Through Dra. Rivera's interactions we see inherent contradictions existing within the academy. For instance, Dra. Rivera, like other FOC and critical scholars, was promised opportunities for substantive change yet found this promise falls short. These faculty are caught in a web of superficial enactments and buzz-word jargon that are devoid of transformative action—except antithetically, when action is taken to avoid implementing progressive ideals so as to not discomfort those benefiting from the status quo. This was illustrated when Dra. Rivera advocated for statements against the CRT attacks but was met with excuses to alleviate any responsibility for living out the vision and mission that was symbolically portrayed on paper.

Rather than being empowered to work for change, FOC and CRT-committed education faculty often get worn down or, worse, completely consumed by a system of contradictions, lies, symbolic gestures, and co-optation. Below we describe two of the most salient contradictions that Dra. Rivera, and others like her, are left to traverse and resist amidst the ongoing legacy of white supremacy and historical oppressions—particularly in the midst of recent anti-CRT manifestations.

“I Value your Perspective and Voice but Only When...”: Institutional Co-Optation

Dra. Rivera's narratives reveal the internal and external struggles faced as she navigates daily microaggressions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Solórzano, 1998) and institutional actions that delegitimize her identity and work as a Latina, CRT, education scholar. From an institutional perspective we see these same actions weaponized by institutional actors to dissuade Dra. Rivera from engaging in transformative and humanizing work. In other words, institutional actors, in these composite stories, Associate Dean Fairchild, Chris (department chair), and Bob (program chair), all work in tandem to dismiss, evade, and perpetually overwhelm Dra. Rivera with service requests that are disguised as “social justice” or “DEI” (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) work but instead serve as “a bunch of freedom checks [the institution] never intends to honor” (Bell, 1992, p. 19).

We saw Dra. Rivera receive various institutional freedom checks. For instance, Dra. Rivera was, like many FOC, lured to her institution via seductive tactics (Stanley, 2006), in this case a reduced course load and promises for change. These insidious tactics make potential Candidates of Color and CRT scholars think these institutions are different—that they are committed to social justice and DEI initiatives. This was further complicated when the Dean, a Man of Color, leveraged

these tactics. Through this particular Dean of Color's actions, we can assume internalized whiteness (Morales, et.al., 2021) was enacted as he has seemingly benefited from a system that reifies and rewards a proximity to whiteness transforming him into a token of racial equity. As noted by Greene (1999), "[a] regime of tokenism is one of symbolic equality in which the professional lives of tokens exist within the paradox of isolation as a person of color within a majority White institution and the heightened visibility and scrutiny to which professors of color are exposed" (p.179).

While hyper-aware of the institutional violence academia has inflicted on Communities of Color (including students, faculty, and staff), Dra. Rivera, and many like her, recognize the risks involved in entering a violent space and relationship with academia (Dutt-Ballerstadt, 2019), however, recognizing the risks and actually navigating the risks on a daily basis are two entirely different things. This is further compounded by the multidimensional nature of navigating predominately white spaces as a multiply marginalized (Martinez, et. al., 2017) critical scholar. In other words, despite the fact that Dra. Rivera negotiated a contract that gave her five years of a 1:2 teaching load, she soon realized the excessive requests for service were not requests. Rather they revealed how her administrators truly thought of her: a mere symbol and token of diversity and equity that they could point to when it benefited them.

As presented, it is Dra. Rivera's gendered and raced identity along with her critical scholarship that the institution attempts to co-opt to better position and promote itself. On the one hand, Dra. Rivera is consistently reminded that her perspective is *too critical* and that her Latinidad is *too much* for a white palate, resulting in institutional actions that seek to silence, block, and dehumanize her and her work. For example, when Dra. Rivera provided the list of demands that emerged from undergrad SOC and the need to integrate CRT, faculty and administrators refused it, pushing back with claims that that would be too much for donors, alumni, and current students to support. On the other hand, Dra. Rivera's Latinidad, womanhood, motherhood, and criticality are put on full display to those looking upon the institution, such as when she is singled out for a *diversity* photo. She becomes a symbol that institutional actors can point to as a marker of DEI priorities. So while the institution may publicly proclaim to generically support social justice, equity, and inclusion publicly, in private spaces it intentionally intercepts, blocks, evades, co-opts, and/or criminalizes those who authentically seek to engage in transformative work. In the end, institutions and institutional actors often work to maintain systems that have benefited them, whereas anyone working to challenge the status quo risks being "called in to be called out."

"Que me Creen, ¿Una Pendeja?": (Re)clamando Power and Space in Academia

Dra. Rivera's critical raced-gendered epistemology allowed her the means to navigate the contradictions of the academy by actively critiquing experiences. Dra. Rivera traversed, survived, and actively nuanced the daily contradictions of the academy, using her critiques to find ways to speak out about injustices and advocate for SOC. This was seen when she accepted the forced labor of leading the ad hoc committee but leveraged it in support of SOC and the call for statements admonishing anti-CRT bills. Critical race theorists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013) acknowledge this contradictory dynamic of educational structures, processes, and discourses holding potential to both oppress and marginalize and to emancipate and empower.

López (2003) noted, "There is a problematic silence that surrounds issues of racism—a silence that is difficult to broach. In fact, most people would rather not discuss racism whatsoever because the topic itself is uncomfortable and unpleasant" (p. 81). Dra. Rivera saw this first-hand as she engaged with Bob and Chris. Despite an opportunity to release a statement speaking against

current white-supremist CRT attacks, they opted to remain silent. Yet, this silence did not stop her and, as mentioned, she leveraged a public statement, supported by SOC's request. Amid the ontological dissonance she experienced, and in spite of receiving a bunch of freedom checks that are seemingly worthless (e.g., \$300 in PD funds), Dra. Rivera did not give up and her stories end on an empowering note—one where she is beginning to recognize institutional contradictions and reclamar [reclaim] her agency and her liberation.

From a methodological standpoint, leaving Dra. Rivera's story without resolution, engages readers to imagine what a solution might look like. A "critical raced-gendered epistemology, grounded in CRT and LatCrit, [...] affirm[s] experiences and responses to different forms of oppression and validates them as appropriate forms of data. By incorporating a counterstorytelling method [...], a story can be told from a non-majoritarian perspective—a story that [w]hite educators usually don't hear or tell (Delgado, 1989, 1993)" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 118). While we certainly agree, we also argue that storytelling serves as an opportunity and space to (re)imagine possible alternatives and to do so without any immediate fear or risks of institutional gazes. We recognize that enacting acts of resistance includes undertaking additional risks (e.g., further marginalization, retaliation, and/or worse denial of tenure and/or promotion), especially now when CRT is being targeted, banned, and criminalized. In an effort to reduce this risk for readers, we hope that readers might not only see themselves in Dra. Rivera as she navigates the seemingly endless pliegues [folds] of institutional contradictions (Anzaldúa, 2007, 2013), but, through that familiarity, also dream of and rewrite a different reality—one that reclaims our/their humanity, dignity, and liberation from institutional constraints, gaze, and worthless freedom checks, and to imagine what actions Dra. Rivera—we—might take in this reclamando and liberatory process and journey.

"Apóyame o Haste a un Lado"

Understanding the experiences of FOC navigating the limitations, contradictions, and hostility of institutional structures and discourses in academia—and in teacher preparation programs in particular where anti-CRT bills are now impacting curricular and departmental decisions making—is an important move towards future action. These composite stories demonstrate the reach that anti-CRT legislation and public protest is having on higher education (Liou & Alvara, 2021) and in teacher preparation programs in particular (Jett et al., 2022). They make visible the operations of white supremacy and racism within the academy and help make sense of current (in)actions around CRT. The consistent evasion and intentional silence on the topic from university administrators reflects the strong hold that white supremacy has on the academy (López, 2003; Viesca & Gray, 2021). Such understanding is integral in order for FOC and other critically-minded faculty to mobilize through collective action across institutions. No matter the political climate, FOC need the unequivocal support and commitment from their institutions to fight for justice and anti-racism and prepare future teachers who can do the same within their own classrooms and schools. We invite readers to dream alongside us as we (re)imagine a different, not yet realized, academy.

More specifically, if academia and teacher preparation programs claim they want to increase the enrollment of SOC (Kohli et al., 2021) and recruit and retain FOC (Turner et al., 2008), support for CRT is essential and necessary. Following are suggestions (dreams) we offer for College of Education and university leadership to humanize, validate, uplift, and advance the work of FOC and CRT scholars in the midst of current anti-CRT pressures.

Institutional Mentorship

Mentorship has been a central component supporting our wellbeing. While we have experienced some formal support for mentoring, we have needed more and have organized ourselves in tight-knit and meaningful ways. We recommend leadership:

- Formally support mentoring opportunities, especially for/with FOC (Davis et al., 2021; Thorne et al., 2021). For example, a department might set up a mentoring system between more senior faculty and junior faculty members and fund meetings and resources. Additionally, support for mentorships across departments as well as institutions is crucial.
- Recognize and voice the need for those in positions of power, and those who hold privilege (e.g., white, male, and tenured faculty) to “pay it forward.” These groups must engage in conscious, strategic decisions around FOC’s service and teaching loads, equity assessments, and bias and discrimination they navigate in the classroom, on evaluations, and beyond. Additionally, those in positions of power should actively mentor FOC into leadership and critique inequitable advancement structures, while also learning from FOC’s concerns about roadblocks and needs for pathways (Gause, 2021).
- Create spaces for mentoring collectives to form. Institutions can provide resources for FOC to account for the time and leadership in developing organizations and groups (Han & Onchwari, 2018). When FOC organically form collectives, this should be valued and supported (e.g. through a dedicated space, institutional recognition, funding, counting toward promotion, etc.) (Pour-Khorshid, 2018).

Institutional Support

We have experienced helpful institutional structures (e.g., funding opportunities at the College level), but have found that more substantive support across all institutional levels is needed. Specifically, we suggest:

- Internal funding that supports FOC and is easily accessible, not requiring tedious amounts of labor to access such “support.”
- Available administrative labor to work *with* faculty, aiding in reports, scheduling, and other processes that take time away from teaching and scholarly work.
- A valuing and backing of the critical scholarship that FOC, and particularly CRT scholars, are hired to do. This includes leadership joining in and institutions responding when there is backlash or subversion against FOC (including curricular decisions and scholarship) by other faculty or students.
- A focus on diversifying practices in hiring (Kayes, 2006; Lopez-Perry et al., 2021). As a part of this, institutions should avoid a focus on hiring FOC into temporary and vulnerable positions so that FOC do not have to, in effect, undergo an extended institutional gaze and interview before they are awarded with a permanent position. Critical evaluation of the hiring practices of FOC must be consistently engaged in.
- Transparency about budgets, staffing decisions (including course releases), leadership

- opportunities, and other structures and processes at all levels (i.e., departmental, college, and university-wide) so that FOC are equitably included. Leadership should also create space for FOC to respond to structures and offer solutions to inequities as a part of this.
- Holistic support of mental, spiritual, and general well-being of faculty, especially for FOC. This might include built in mental-health days, access to and coverage of mental health providers, access to meditation spaces, time for physical activity and free access to recreational spaces, support (e.g., adequate leave beyond a few weeks that isn't hidden and doesn't require exhaustive processes to access) during times of prenatal, post-natal, parenting, medical, and other needs.

Institutional Cultural Change

The previous recommendation lists point to a far larger and necessary need—a cultural shift within the academy. Universities have been historically constructed to center the ontologies and epistemologies of white men of upper classes in Western societies, preserving their social standings and the status quo. The very cultural foundations, then, of these institutions are hostile to FOC and CRT scholars who hold collectivist and critical orientations. We dream of:

- Promotion, tenure, and retention metrics and structures that intentionally center social justice and equity work with this commitment required, recognized, and strongly valued across teaching, service, and scholarship. This includes member selection for evaluation committees.
- Leadership and tenured faculty that engage in work before asking vulnerable faculty to lead projects, chair committees, direct programs, and take on additional service roles. This includes respecting the nuances of FOC's work and not simply lumping all "justice" work together (Arnold et al., 2021). While being protected, FOC and CRT scholar's voices will be amplified and valued by leadership.
- A compensation that equitably honors all faculty across the university so that a faculty member in one college does not receive a generous wage, while a faculty member in another college (e.g., education) qualifies for government assistance in order to support her family.
- A collectivist orientation in which collaboration is normalized across all levels of institutions rather than positioned as suspect (Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022). This includes valuing co-written articles and creative scholarship as much as or more than individual papers written in white masculinist and Western formats. Co-teaching and other collectivist approaches to teaching, service, and scholarship would also be supported, not just through appreciation, but through formal structures (e.g., a reconstructed teaching load).
- Programs, departments, divisions/colleges, and universities that change the culture from one that avoids conversations centered on race and that marginalizes, penalizes, and criminalizes racial justice and equity work to one that authentically and meaningfully embodies and lives it (Pham, 2021).

Conclusion: An Invitation

Through our experiences and the process of developing this manuscript, including the composite character, Dra. Rivera, and her stories, we were reminded that it is a desperate struggle to stop and imagine what could be. Ultimately, we are able to engage in this work out of our collectivity and, thus, we end by inviting others to dream with us and, from a CRT foundation, begin adding counterstories, invoking a decolonial imagining that works toward another academia—an academia for all. Our hope, then, is that this manuscript is a catalyst for you to join us in this work. Through the collective bringing together of our own and other's stories, then, we assert: academic institutions need to “Apóyame o haste a un lado.”

Dedication

Noriah Hope [January 17, 2017 to March 23, 2022]: We dedicate this manuscript in your memory and the beautiful presence you had on this Earth. This manuscript was a labor of love between us and we know you're smiling down on us from Heaven.

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The Evasion Pedagogy of Anti-“Critical Race Theory” Policy Actions

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Abstract

In the summer of 2020, while the United States was immersed in the COVID-19 pandemic, the murder of George Floyd became the catalyst for a national reckoning with persisting systemic racial injustice despite decades of civil rights efforts. While many Americans from all backgrounds became mobilized for justice, others perceived this movement as a threat, and politicians seized this opportunity to capitalize on that fear as a way of gaining political support. The academic concept of critical race theory (CRT) was quickly usurped as the catch-all term for any anti-racist effort, though few politicians or Americans understood what CRT is or what it aims to accomplish. Here, we provide a brief overview of CRT and how it has been intentionally misrepresented for political purposes since 2020. Then, we present a frame analysis of state and federal policy actions taking an anti-“critical race theory” stance in education and illustrate how an evasion pedagogy is being enacted across the United States that is grounded and fueled by extreme ideological thinking.

Keywords: *critical race theory, teaching/learning, pedagogy, equity, policy*

Introduction

Critical race theory (CRT) developed as a response to the stalled advances of the civil rights era during the mid 1970’s (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Legal scholars acknowledged that while there had been significant progress in improving the racist state of the nation, racism persisted and largely became conceived as:

A discrete and identifiable act of “prejudice based on skin color” [which] placed virtually the entire range of everyday practices in America—social practices developed and maintained throughout the period of formal American apartheid—beyond the scope of critical examination or legal remediation. (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xv)

Early CRT scholars thus called for expanding the legal scholarship and activism that led to the civil rights movement (Crenshaw, 1988) and reinterpreting civil rights laws to unmask the undermining systemic and institutional factors sustaining racial inequity (Tate, 1997). As a theory, CRT was developed to expose how “so-called race-neutral laws and policies perpetuate racial and/or ethnic and gender subordination” (Bernal, 2002, p. 108). In 1993, Matsuda and colleagues set forth six tenets often cited as defining CRT:

Critical race theory:

1. recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.
2. expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and meritocracy.
3. challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law...Critical race theorists...adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
4. insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and [their] communities of origin in analyzing law and society.
5. is interdisciplinary.
works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. (p. 6)

As these tenets illustrate, CRT is an anti-oppressive theory that challenges assumptions embedded in American laws and politics. Ladson-Billings and Tate introduced CRT into educational research in 1995, and it has since framed innumerable diverse studies. However, many teachers and educators have only recently heard of CRT, and the following explains why.

In June of 2021, *The New Yorker* reported on how a conservative activist, Christopher Rufo, invented the conflict over “critical race theory¹” (Wallace-Wells, 2021). Rufo analyzed varying diversity training materials and was introduced to CRT as he explored footnotes. He wrote about his findings and appeared in early September 2020 on Tucker Carlson’s television show, naming “crt” an existential threat to the United States and calling on President Trump to issue an executive order “to stamp out this destructive, divisive pseudoscientific ideology” (Wallace-Wells, 2021, para 8).

Within the same month, President Trump formed the 1776 Commission (The President’s Advisory 1776 Commission, 2021) and issued the Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping (Exec. Order No. 13950, 2020), which became the first anti-“crt” policy action in a series of policy activities that at the time of this writing is still growing in number and reach. On March 15, 2021, Rufo tweeted:



Christopher F. Rufo ✂️🔒
@realchrisrufo

...

Replying to @realchrisrufo and @ConceptualJames

We have successfully frozen their brand—"critical race theory"—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category.

2:14 PM · Mar 15, 2021 · Twitter Web App

1. We are using quotation marks around critical race theory or “crt” whenever it is being used as part of the current cultural conflict versus its academic definition. When we use it without quotation marks or with the acronym CRT we are discussing critical race theory in academic terms, supported by research literature.

As this tweet indicates, the use of “crt” as a label was deliberate to craft a cultural uprising that reaches far beyond how academics define CRT. In fact, this branding of “crt” remains so vague, varying, and all-encompassing that it prompts confusion and for many, fear. Further, the focal point of this cultural conflict is teaching and learning, particularly in K-12 schools, but also in higher education and other government sponsored teaching and learning.

In the context of this cultural moment where “crt” has sparked a series of political actions impacting teaching and learning, we began to recognize evasion pedagogies (Viesca & Gray, 2021) at play. Evasion pedagogies, described in more detail below, are essentially the ways in which teaching is operationalized as surveillance and learning as compliance, resulting in robotic performances where opportunities to authentically teach and learn as well as disrupt inequities were evaded. In an effort to both document and further investigate the anti-“crt” policy actions and their relationship to evasion pedagogies, we conducted a frame analysis of 23 policy actions taken by politicians at the federal and state levels. We asked:

- What are the messages regarding racism, teaching, and learning in recent policy actions opposing “critical race theory”?
- What are the ideologies imbued in these messages regarding racism, teaching, and learning in recent policy actions opposing “critical race theory”?

We found that through the use of policy actions that promote a cultural narrative against “crt” grounded in extreme ideological thinking, an evasion pedagogy is being enacted across the United States to proactively disrupt progress towards racial justice. Through our analysis of the content of the policy actions that are part of the anti-“crt” movement, we demonstrate how extreme ideological thinking constructs and perpetuates evasion pedagogies. These evasion pedagogies impact students, teachers, families, and schools as well as our broader society in general and mirror the evasion pedagogies found in classrooms.

Evasion Pedagogies

Recently, we forwarded the notion of evasion pedagogies as a way to explore, understand, and disrupt typical classroom practices that contribute to sustaining racial and other systemic, oppressive inequities (Viesca & Gray, 2021). The notion of evasion came from Annamma et al.’s (2017) work naming color-evasiveness as the more accurate description (and less ableist term) to expand a color-blind racial ideology in schools and society. They talk about evasion as about “avoidance or escape” and “not about explicitly creating solutions to problems” (p. 156). The avoidance or escape from responsibility for racial oppression and white supremacy has long been explored by race scholars and is an overt part of Mills’s (1997) discussion of the racial contract and his theory of white racial ignorance. These evasions of responsibility are commonplace in our scholarly understandings of whiteness and in the behaviors, attitudes, policies, and practices that sustain white supremacy because they still play a major role in school and society today.

Matias (2022) recently called for critical whiteness scholars to construct a Black whiteness studies by, among other things, addressing the complicit actions that, regardless of their intention, sustain white supremacy. Matias warns that without such efforts, we risk “forever residing in the conundrum of racism without racists” (p. 6). Hayes (2022) also recently addressed the common place of evasion, even in the context of white liberals who claim to work for racial justice (like two of the three authors of this study). Hayes calls for more aggressive, color-conscious efforts to

disrupt daily interactions, thought processes, and social structures that subordinate people of color to white people. This work must include moving away from evasion to taking responsibility for any complicit actions, ideas, attitudes, and/or behaviors that sustain the inequitable status quo. Chang-Bacon (2022) underscores how common evasion is in teacher education and argues that race-evasion is “not a byproduct of passive omission, but instead involves active, discursive effort” (p. 1).

Essentially, there is a great deal of evidence that *evasion is the goal* and is carefully constructed rather than being an unintended consequence in the face of inequities and power imbalances. Evasion masks white complicity and ensures that racism and other oppressive projects are someone else’s responsibility (perhaps even a historical someone), rather than the direct result of actions, attitudes, behaviors, and cultural practices perpetuated by real people, including us, every day.

For this reason, we linked evasion with pedagogies. As teachers, teacher educators, and educational researchers ourselves, a great deal of our everyday actions, attitudes, behaviors, and cultural practices are linked to teaching and learning. However, we agree with Lee et al. (2020) who argue, “to be alive as a human being is to learn” (p. xviii). Therefore, we conceptualize pedagogy as an expansive concept that goes beyond the project of teaching and learning in classrooms to encompass the complex interplay of theory, method, orientation, and practice in various spaces with multiple, varied actors. Further, as Freire (1994) suggests, we see learning inextricably intertwined with teaching.

These deeply complex and meaningful connections between teaching and learning are at the heart of pedagogy and can occur anywhere in any kind of relationship. Yet, there is substantial evidence to suggest that beautifully complex and intricately meaningful teaching/learning are not consistently available to all students in US public schools (e.g., Lee, 2009; Morris, 2016). Education researchers and activists have fought for meaningful pedagogical changes in myriad ways—by developing multicultural education and expanding it to critical multiculturalism (Nieto, 1999). Advocating for culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002) and more recently for culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012; Alim et al., 2020) and culturally revitalizing pedagogies (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Each of these conceptualizations of pedagogy offers radical ideas for liberation from racial oppression and continue to build pedagogical possibilities built on love, community, and pluralism. Yet, even with all this work over multiple decades, the needle on racial equity hasn’t moved substantially.

Evasion pedagogies are so normalized and part of the typical cultural scripts that govern teaching/learning spaces that they are not always easily recognized. However, Matias et al. (2022) argue that “direct analysis of racism and white supremacy is dependent on interrogating how hegemonic racialized whiteness operates in automaticity” (p. 4). Therefore, examining how evasion pedagogies work and what comprises them is important for disrupting that automaticity as well as the white complicity in creating racialized harm that is so typically evaded. Through these mechanisms, evasion pedagogies are created and sustained, not only inside K-12 classrooms, but at a broader societal level as well. As we will illustrate through our analysis of the policy actions, politicians are engaging in evasion pedagogies through the ways in which they are weaponizing the language of democracy to subserve the democratic ideals that hold space for plurality and diversity of thought.

Methodology

Informed by the concept of evasion pedagogies, we conducted a frame analysis to explore the content of 23 anti-“crt” policy actions in order to document their messages as well as explore what relationship, if any, exists between the anti-“crt” policy actions and the notion of evasion pedagogies.

Frame Analysis

We selected frame analysis (Goffman, 1974) as our methodology for this study because it examines the frames, or the “vehicles for larger systems of belief” (Jefferies, 2009, p. 27) that shape meaning to convey and promote messages, claims, grievances, proposals, and policy. Frames work to structure systems of representation in society by articulating discourses, ideas, or sets of shared beliefs (Tucker, 1998). Therefore, frame analysis considers how messages are framed in various texts, including policy, to examine the ideologies linked to such frames (Viesca, 2013). Further, an important aspect of frame analysis is identifying the ways each frame legitimizes certain actions while shutting down and delegitimizing others (Coburn, 2006). To accomplish this in frame analysis, the metaphor of a physical frame is poignant. Bateson (1972) explained, “The frame around a picture, if we consider this frame as a message intended to order or organize the perception of the viewer, says, ‘Attend to what is within and do not attend to what is outside’” (p. 187).

All message makers (or framers) use cultural resources like beliefs, ideologies, values, and myths to frame a message that legitimates, motivates, and persuades (Davies, 2002) by deliberately choosing what is contained within the frame and what is not. Therefore, as a methodology, frame analysis regards frames as methods of interrogating beliefs, ideologies, values, and myths by noting which of these resources are drawn on to create the frame as well as which of these cultural resources are not utilized.

As a methodology, frame analysis was especially suitable for this study because the policy actions are so similar. Most of the policy actions in the analyzed dataset used language and ideas that originated with President Trump’s Executive Order from September 2020 (Exec. Order No. 13950, 2020). As such, our dataset functions as a cohesive set of texts constructing consistent messages and drawing on similar ideologies across the body of the policy actions. Frame analysis was thus useful to answer our research questions by interrogating the messages across the body of policy actions around racism and teaching/learning as well as to dig deeper into the ideologies imbued in those messages. By identifying the messages and related ideologies, we sought to tease out their relationship to evasion pedagogies.

Data Sources

Data collected for this study were selected based on the following criteria. First, we collected policy actions at the state and federal level that were intended (partially or fully) to impact K-12 teaching/learning. A policy action in this study is understood as any official action taken by a policymaker holding a position in government to impact or control various social and educational outcomes. Second, we collected the data in August of 2021 and only collected policy actions available at that time. There have since been additional policy actions proposed and/or enacted in various states that are not represented in our dataset. And, while the policy actions in our dataset are

deliberately consistent in content, the scope of their impact across varying geographies is important to document. Therefore, we included all policy actions in effect at the state level at the time of data collection. Third, because of the flow of policy actions beginning with President Trump's September 2020 Executive Order, we chose to include all policy actions that at the time of data collection had occurred at the federal level, though only one of them (an amendment to the budget reconciliation) passed and is in effect at the time of writing. Due to the volume of policy actions considered at the state level, as well as the replication in content of those policy actions, we have chosen to only focus on policy actions at the state level that were passed and/or put into effect in August 2021, our time of data collection. Finally, our representations of our dataset in Figure 1 illustrates the latest available information regarding each policy action as of mid-March 2022. Due to the ongoing and dynamic nature of this anti-"crt" movement, it is possible that the texts we analyzed and the information we provide regarding these policy actions will change, perhaps even before our study is published.

Figure 1: Data Sources

| Name of Policy Action/ Dataset Code | History/ Timeline | Governing Body | Description |
|---|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Federal Actions | | | |
| Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping (EO #13950) (Dataset: F1) | 9.22.20 Enacted 01.20.21 Repealed | White House Executive Order | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original executive order impacting all others in this study (provided wording for subsequent policies; see Figure 3) • Prohibits federal funding for education promoting "divisive concepts" "race scapegoating" or "race stereotyping." |
| Saving American History Act of 2021. S. 2035 (Dataset: F2) | 6.10.21 Introduced | US Senate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bill proposed to prohibit federal funding to K-12 schools teaching the 1619 Project. |
| Ending Critical Race Theory in D.C. Public Schools Act. H.R. 3937 (Dataset: F3) | 6.16.21 Introduced | US House of Representatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed to prohibit the <i>compelling</i> or <i>directing</i> of students or teachers to <i>adopt</i> prohibited ideas around race or sex stereotyping or scapegoating in DC Public Schools. |
| Stop CRT Act. S. 2346 (Dataset: F4) | 7.14.21 Introduced | US Senate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bill proposed codifying Executive Order 13950 into law. |
| Protecting Students from Racial Hostility Act. S. 2574 (Dataset: F5) | 7.30.21 Introduced | US Senate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bill proposed to address racially hostile school environments caused by school curricula • Requires that state agencies report complaints to the state attorney general |
| Peace Act. S. 2682 (Dataset: F6) | 8.9.21 Introduced | US Senate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposes that federal education funds cannot be used for teaching divisive concepts. |
| CRT Amendment. Cotton Amdt. No. 3680 (Dataset: F7) | 8.11.21 Senate. passed 8.24.21 House passed | US Congress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amendment to the budget resolution • Gives the Chairman of the Committee on the Budget of the Senate authority to revise allocations relating to education so that critical race theory is not promoted in PreK-12 settings. |

| Name of Policy Action/ Dataset Code | History/Timeline | Governing Body | Description |
|--|---|-------------------------------|---|
| State Legislation | | | |
| House Bill 377 (Dataset: S-ID) | 4.28.21 Signed | Idaho State Legislature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibits public education institutions from directing or compelling students to “personally affirm, adopt, or adhere to” divisive concepts Prohibits state funding for teaching prohibited concepts |
| Oklahoma House Bill 1775 (Dataset: S-OK) | 5.7.21 Signed | Oklahoma State Legislature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibits engagement with certain ideas |
| Public Chapter No. 493 Senate Bill No. 623 (Dataset: S-TN) | 5.25.21 Signed | Tennessee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibits schools from including or promoting particular concepts Commissioner of education can withhold state funds |
| H.R. 901 (Dataset – S-UT) | 5.25.21 Finalized | Utah | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resolution regarding “appropriate education on history, civil rights, and racism” |
| House File 802 (Dataset S-IA) | 6.8.21 Signed | Iowa | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibits “race and sex stereotyping training” |
| HBA No. A3979 SB 3 (Dataset S-TX) | 6.15.21 HBA No. A3979 Signed 9.3.21 amended with SB 3 9.17.21 Signed | Texas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On social studies curriculum--prohibits teachers from being <i>compelled</i> to discuss current events Prohibits school use of private funding to teach outside the guidelines of this bill Students cannot be punished for discussing prohibited ideas |
| H. 4100 (Dataset S-SC) | 6.25.21 Signed | South Carolina | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of the funding appropriations bill Prohibits state funding to teach certain concepts |
| House Bill 2 (Dataset S-NH) | 6.25.21 Signed | New Hampshire | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of appropriations bill Promotes freedom of discrimination in workplaces and education Aggrieved persons may initiate civil action Educators violating law will be subject to disciplinary sanction |
| AZ HB2898 (Dataset S-AZ) | 6.30.21 Signed | Arizona | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of appropriations bill Prohibits certain instruction Educators in violation will face disciplinary action Suits may be filed for violations Court may impose civil penalties up to \$5000 per school district or state agency |

| Name of Policy Action/ Dataset Code | History/ Timeline | Governing Body | Description |
|--|----------------------|--|--|
| State Boards of Education | | | |
| A Resolution of the State Board of Education of the State of Georgia (Dataset SBE-GA) | 6.3.21 Passed | Georgia State Department of Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lists beliefs and affirmations regarding Georgia and the US as not racist • No legal standing, but limits federal funding |
| R277-328. (Dataset SBE-UT) | 6.3.21 Approved | Utah State Board of Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board approved rules for S-UT • Provisions for parental oversight and public approval of curriculum |
| 6A-1.094124 (Dataset SBE-FL) | 10.10.21 Passed | Florida Board of Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States certain topics and documents that must be taught “faithfully” |
| Title 210 (Dataset SBE-OK) | 9.23.21 Approved | Oklahoma State Department of Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules of S-OK • Schools cannot include listed discriminatory principles • Schools must develop and disseminate policies to notify teachers/students of their right to file complaints • Protections outlined for those filing a complaint |
| Other State Actions | | | |
| Action 1776 (Dataset SA-SD1) | 5.3.21 | South Dakota Governor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pledge for government officials to sign • Lists “beliefs” and “concrete steps” |
| Attorney General Opinion: Volume No. 58 Opinion No. 1 (Dataset SA-MO) | 5.27.21 | Montana State Attorney General | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Montana Attorney General’s (AG) perspective on whether teaching CRT or “antiracism” is legal. • AG’s opinion is that in many instances it is illegal. |
| Letter of Intent Regarding Federal Grants in History and Civics (Dataset SA-SD2) | 8.18.21 | South Dakota State Legislature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-binding letter asking that no federal grants be applied for regarding education in history and civics until the legislature weighs in on various related issues. |

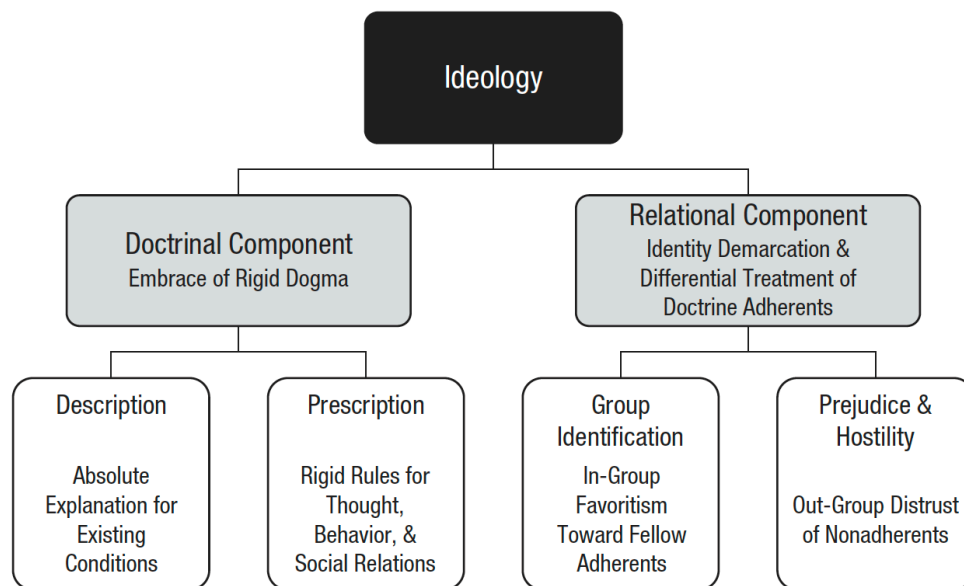
Data Analysis

We read the policy actions independently multiple times and took extensive notes on various aspects of the policies like problem definition, participants, diagnosed causes, moral judgments, suggested remedies, and omissions (Bustelo & Verloo, 2006; Entman, 1993) to tease out the frames around racism and teaching/learning across the actions. We regularly met, discussed our notes, and proposed findings. This iterative process included revisiting research literature regarding various ideologies. We quickly noted the presence of white supremacy in our dataset as well as individualism, but some of the messages we found appeared to be in conflict with one another and perhaps drawing from conflicting ideologies. Extremist ideologies like illiberalism,

authoritarianism, and moral absolutism were evident in the data, but we struggled to make sense of the complexity of these ideologies and the simplicity and straightforward nature of the messages in the policy actions. As we continued to work through this conundrum, we continued to search and read research on ideologies and found a useful conceptualization for our study.

Zmigrod (2022) argues that sufficient research exists looking at individual ideologies and their components (like we were striving to do), but a focus on the components of ideological thinking is lacking. To drive such shifts, Zmigrod proposes a model of “ideological thinking” as a way to explore thinking across various ideologies. Her model illustrates thinking that rigidly adheres to doctrine and resists any updating of beliefs with the introduction of new evidence. Further, Zmigrod argues that ideological thinking has a relationship component that generates favorable orientations towards an in-group adherents and antagonism towards out-group adherents.

Figure 2: Zmigrod (2022) “Components and subcomponents of ideology that are consequently psychologically reflected in ideological thinking.”



The need for such a model of ideological thinking is based on the findings from research that sometimes diverse and even opposing ideologies use similar tools and features to indoctrinate and motivate their followers towards collective action (Zmigrod, 2022). Therefore, ideological thinking can be engaged in by those on the political right or left and could also play a role in teaching and learning spaces, regardless of the political orientation of the context or people in that context. Notably, Zmigrod does not argue that some people do not engage in ideological thinking while others do, rather, he asserts a spectrum from moderate to extreme where ideological thinking at the moderate end allows for and expects diversity in thought, practice, and experience. Those at the moderate end of the spectrum also adjust their thinking based on the presentation of new evidence and ideas. In contrast, extreme ideological thinking is deeply entrenched and resistant to change. As we worked through our data analysis, this conceptualization of ideological thinking was pivotal in finalizing our understandings and findings. It is further applied in our discussion of the findings below.

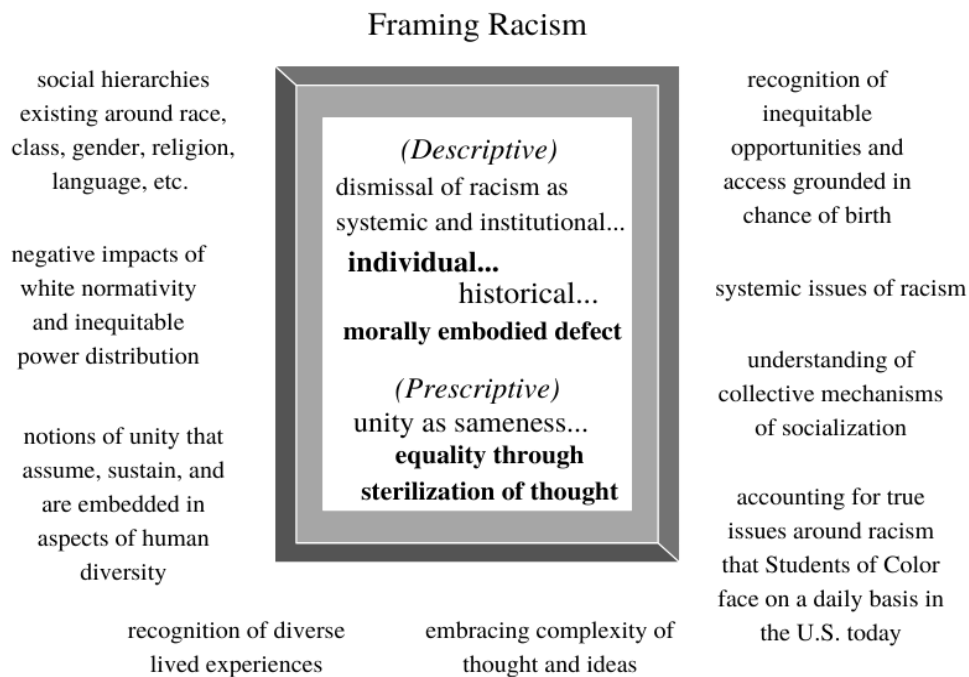
Findings

Based on our research questions, we identified two frames: racism and teaching/learning. Within those frames we identified powerful, consistent and, at times, contradicting messages. The following sections explore those messages as well as their relationship to evasion pedagogies and extreme ideological thinking.

Framing of Racism in the Anti-“crt” Policy Actions

Figure 3 offers an overview of our findings regarding the framing of racism in our dataset with details that are further explored below. Consistent with Zmigrod’s (2022) conceptualization of extreme ideological thinking, there was a clear message within this frame that described the problem of racism as well as one that offered a solution for the problem. Further, in- and out-groups were clearly articulated, underscoring the presence of both the relational and doctrinal component of extreme ideological thinking across these policy actions.

Figure 3: *Framing Racism in the Anti-“crt” Policy Actions*



Racism is a Morally Embedded Defect in Individuals, Particularly Historically

A consistent message across the policy actions describes racism as a morally embedded defect in individuals, particularly historically. This message was constructed with the repeated use of words like “individual” (found in six of the eleven statements from the original executive order and replicated across most of the policy actions) and the fact that 89% of the policy action lists link racism to moral character. Further, across the policy actions, racism was framed as historical,

suggesting that racism is a feature of the past and not a relevant or necessary topic for contemporary study or understanding of current contexts. For instance, in S-TX, an act that focuses on the allowed concepts in social studies curriculum, it explicitly lists permitted “historical documents” and “histories” like that of white supremacy (and how it is morally wrong) as well as leaders of various civil rights movements in US history like Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King, Jr. However, the section immediately following the list of what is permitted states, “a teacher may not be compelled to discuss a particular current event or widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs.” While this does not prohibit teachers from exploring racism in current events, it does contribute to a framing of racism as historical rather than contemporary. Another example is in F1, the Trump Executive Order and original anti-“crt” policy action, which contains a discussion of the ideals and history of the United States. It suggests that because of the boycott in Montgomery and the Selma-to-Montgomery marches, children are now growing up in a country that is living out its creed, “that all men are created equal.”

Across the policy actions, this framing works as the “absolute explanation for existing conditions,” or the descriptive aspects of the doctrine of ideological thinking (Zmigrod, 2022). The message that racism is a morally embedded defect in individuals is very productive for evasion pedagogies and evading the responsibility of racist behaviors and impacts by citing moral innocence. With such a reductive, insufficient definition that serves as an absolute explanation for racism, evasion pedagogies are preserved, and racial violence and oppression ensured. Enacting this absolute explanation for existing conditions creates teaching/learning spaces, both inside and outside the classroom, that evade not just understanding what racism is and has been, but also the possibility of accountability where appropriate. Additionally, holding racism as an individual moral defect situates the responsibility for racism on individual human outliers rather than on systems, cultural practices, and social narratives. At its core, this message is an evasion pedagogy creating permission for humans who engage with these ideas and subscribe to them to evade their responsibility and complicity in sustaining white supremacy and racial oppression.

Sameness is the Solution

Across the policy actions, there is a clear message that serves as a “prescription” or the “rigid rules for thoughts and behavior” (Zmigrod, 2022) that suggest that issues of racism should be overcome through a consistent message around unity and equality grounded in sameness and sterilization of thought as the antidote to racism. Much of this messaging is born from the frequently cited idea that “all men are created equal.” While there are certainly other interpretations of this statement, across our dataset, it is largely employed to mean that all men have equal *opportunity*. Thus, where inequities exist, it is the fault of the individual who did not take advantage of the opportunities provided to them.

This framing also constructs the relational component of the ideological thinking imbued in the messages across these policy actions, specifically suggesting those individuals who have been given equal opportunities and have not produced sufficient results are at fault for their own challenges and oppressions. Such individuals are constructed as the out-group, unwilling to conform, and unwilling to perform unity as sameness. They are the problem, not the extreme ideological thinking positioning them as a problem nor the evasion pedagogy that evades responsibility for the well-documented inequitable circumstances of American life.

Outside the Frame: Diversity and Complexity

As Figure 3 illustrates, there are a variety of important ideas that are outside the framing of racism across the analyzed policy actions. Specifically, any acknowledgement or embrace of diversity and complexity is outside the frame, underscoring the extreme ideological nature of these policy actions and their ability to support and perpetuate evasion pedagogies. Outside of the framing of racism is any understanding of racism as systemic and institutional, the way CRT emphasizes racism operates in society (now and historically). Also outside of the frame are different views of how racism operates and could be addressed. In contrast to an absolute definition of racism, across the scholarly and activist community working towards racial justice, there are myriad perspectives and nuanced differences (Tuck & Wang, 2018) that are substantively outside of this framing both in content and variation. This framing of racism holds no space for the exploration of complexities, diversity of thought, or life experiences regarding racism.

With the dogmatic nature and the extreme ideological thinking at work in the analyzed policy actions, it is also important to note that many people positioned as the “out-group” by these policy actions would actually agree with several statements in the policy actions themselves. For instance, the most consistent idea used across the policy actions is that no one race or sex is inherently superior to another. Considering CRT’s commitment to end racial oppression and all forms of oppression, this idea is one that CRT scholars fervently endorse. However, because of the intellectually dishonest approach to defining “crt” occurring both inside and outside of these policy actions, the framing of racism across the policy actions suggests that those in the ideological out-group believe in and promote the racial superiority of one group over another, leaving the true perspectives of racial justice scholars and activists outside of the frame. Further it is through these false narratives that image over substance is used to create an evasion pedagogy. By creating a deceptive and incorrect image of racial justice advocates and scholars as those seeking to replicate racial injustices and oppression versus the substance of what those groups are truly seeking to do (dismantle racial oppression and hierarchies), an evasion pedagogy is constructed and perpetuated, evading truth for fiction and further skirting responsibility for racialized harm.

In terms of the message around racism that serves as the ideological prescription that sameness is the solution, the framing does not include a recognition of inequitable opportunities and access grounded in chance of birth nor the well documented social hierarchies that exist around race, class, gender, etc. Further, white normativity and how sameness in the context of white supremacy creates racial oppression is outside of the framing of racism in these policy actions. Similarly, notions of unity that assume, sustain, and are embedded in aspects of human diversity—a necessary concept for the success of democracy and democratic practices—are completely outside of the frame. Universalist notions of solutions grounded in sameness are largely constructed through the practices of whiteness that maintain white supremacy and are thus in and of themselves perpetuators of racial oppression. Further, they construct an evasion pedagogy that proactively overlooks and at times pretends the natural, normal, regular, and expected forms of human diversity do not exist. In such a case, evasion pedagogies truly evade reality.

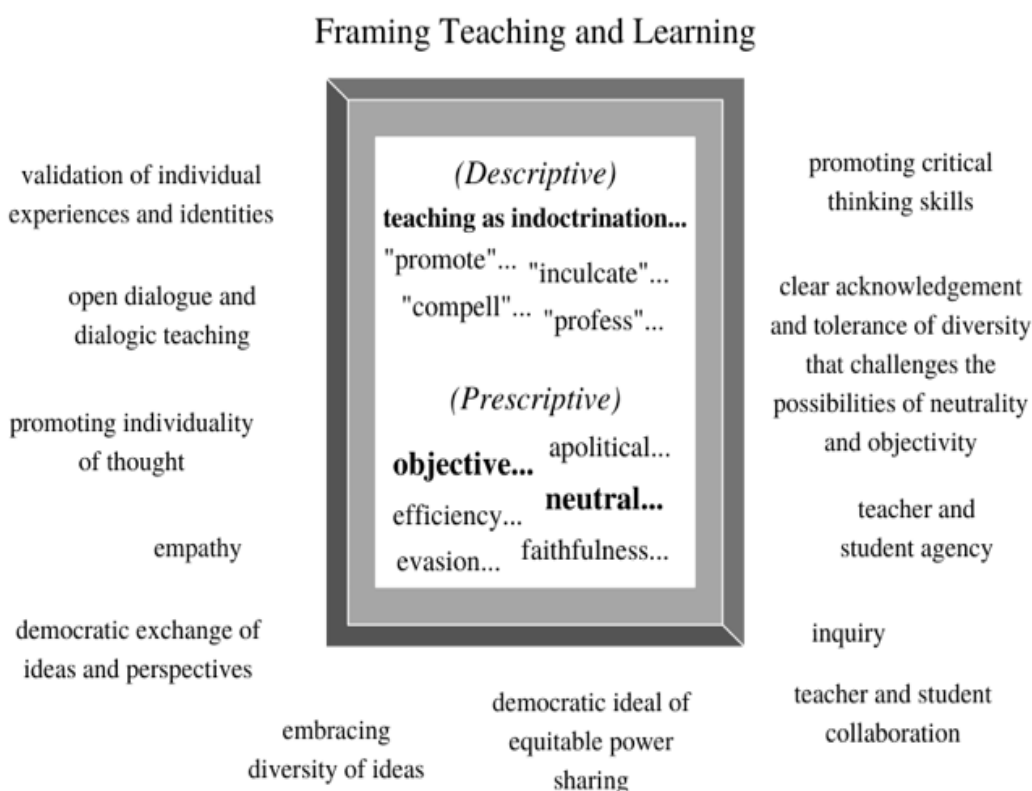
This evasion of reality is further illustrated in how our dataset constructed in-groups and out-groups through extreme ideological thinking, leaving much outside of the frame. Research clearly documents myriad issues around the experiences of Students of Color (e.g., Morris, 2016) grounded in “adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race” (F1, F3, F4, F5, F6, S-OK, S-TN, S-IA, S-TX, S-SC, S-NH, S-AZ, SBE-GA, SBE-OK, SA-MO). Similarly, research has clearly documented the prevalence of Students of Color feeling (e.g., Lee, 2009) “discomfort, guilt,

anguish,” and other forms “of psychological distress on account of his or her race” (F1, F3, F5, F6, S-OK, S-TN, S-IA, S-TX, S-SC, S-AZ, SBE-GA, SBE-OK). These policies are seeking to protect white students from such “adverse treatment,” “discomfort, guilt,” and “anguish.” As such, the extreme ideological thinking that is imbued across this dataset clearly framed messages that evade reality and responsibility, thus enacting and promoting evasion pedagogies.

Framing of Teaching and Learning in the Anti-“crt” Policy Actions

Similar to our findings regarding the framing of racism across the policy actions, the framing of teaching and learning across the dataset also illustrates extreme ideological thinking and evasion pedagogies.

Figure 4: *Framing Teaching and Learning in the Anti-“crt” Policy Actions*



Teaching/Learning as Indoctrination

We found consistency in the verbs used to describe teaching and learning across the policy actions. The most frequently used verbs to describe teaching and learning across the policy actions were “promote” and “compel.” Other frequently used verbs also suggest indoctrination, such as “inculcate,” “profess,” and “advocate.”

The notion of teaching/learning as indoctrination is easy to understand as extreme ideological thinking. However, it also acts as an evasion pedagogy by limiting the kind of relationship that can exist between teacher and students as well as limiting the notion of teaching/learning itself. Teaching/learning as indoctrination is what Freire (1994) called the banking model of education.

In such a model, the teacher deposits information into a student's head—a head that is conceived of as empty. Such perceptions of teaching/learning do not account for diversity of thought, perspective, wishes, interests, and backgrounds on behalf of the teachers or the students. Nor does teaching/learning as indoctrination account for the ability of teachers to learn from students and students to teach their teachers. Teaching/learning as indoctrination is an evasion pedagogy. Such teaching is not about critical thinking, exploration, or creativity. It's about regurgitation, memorization, obedience, and dominance. Such teaching/learning is an evasion pedagogy—evading the natural and normal ways we teach/learn as well as the natural and normal forms of diversity. Teaching/learning as indoctrination is an evasion pedagogy that evades true teaching and learning while sustaining inequity.

Teaching/Learning as Apolitical, Objective, and Neutral

In contrast to the framing of teaching/learning as indoctrination, there is a consistent framing of teaching/learning as apolitical, objective, and neutral across the dataset. Once we applied Zmigrod's (2022) conceptualization of ideological thinking, this made sense to us as the prescriptive solution to the descriptive issue of indoctrination. However, without that conceptualization, these ideas felt in conflict. For instance, in S-TX the policy action states that teachers should, “strive to explore the topic from diverse and contending perspectives without giving deference to any one perspective.” Such an approach is widely accepted by racial justice educators to allow students to understand the variety of perspectives in the world and construct their own ideas and opinions based on a free and open exploration. On the other hand, the way apolitical, objective, and neutral teaching is operationalized across the policy documents is akin to the ideologically prescriptive solution offered in how racism is framed: through sameness.

For example, in F2 what is considered neutral and objective is “teaching to generate a knowledgeable patriotic citizenship,” with narrow definitions of what a knowledgeable patriotic citizen is. In SBE-FL, the language is often used that teaching should be done “efficiently and faithfully,” also suggesting one clearly defined pathway for that to occur. These messages don't just illustrate extreme ideological thinking, they also are clear evasion pedagogy boosters. After all, evading the possibilities for difference and the open exploration of ideas is a sure way to not have to take responsibility for the issues those open explorations of ideas would uncover.

In terms of the relational component of ideological thinking, there are times when teachers are framed as an in-group across the policy actions (a group where “crt” is imposed on them) and times when teachers are the out-group (a group imposing “crt”). Overall, it appears that the in-group aspect of ideological thinking across these policy actions is largely constructed as innocent, morally upstanding “patriots” who treat everyone “equally.” The out-group is then anyone who would suggest the group in power is anything but moral patriots dedicated to equality. This is clearly an instance of image mattering more than substance and, again, another tool through which evasion pedagogies thrive.

Outside the Frame: More Diversity and Complexity

Many things are left outside of the teaching/learning frame, including Freire's (1994) conceptualizations of dialogic teaching where power relationships as well as the roles between teachers and learners are blurred. What is further left outside of the frame is a clear acknowledgement

and tolerance of diversity that challenges the possibilities of neutrality and objectivity. As discussed above, such commitment to neutrality and objectivity, especially in the context of teaching and learning grounded in white normativity, becomes a tool for sustaining white supremacy in policy and practice. Further, embracing diversity and creating the context for it to be positively productive is outside of the framing around teaching and learning, thus leaving the democratic possibilities of creating and constructing varying citizen identities outside of the frame.

Conclusion

Our analysis illustrates that an evasion pedagogy is being enacted across the United States through policy actions that promote a cultural narrative against anti-racism grounded in extreme ideological thinking. This evasion pedagogy is not only evading the responsibility for racist issues and evading reality, but also proactively disrupting progress towards racial justice in schools and society. Further, as an evasion pedagogy, it is impacting teaching and learning in a variety of spaces, not just within schools. The narratives about “crt” and its dangers are thriving while actual racist harm and deadly violence continue to be consistently propagated against racially minoritized students, families, and communities. From K-12 classrooms to national policy movements, evasion pedagogies must be disrupted and replaced with humanizing, anti-racist, anti-oppressive teaching/learning opportunities that allow for individual and collective self-actualization in reciprocity and create the context for actual liberty and justice for all.

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Silenced and Pushed Out: The Harms of CRT-bans on K-12 Teachers

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Abstract

Over the past year, sweeping local and state-wide policies framed as bans against “CRT” are being propagated to restrict how race and racism can be taught in K-12 schools across the nation. As a result, schools are increasingly becoming a place where teachers face interpersonal and professional risk for teaching about US racial realities, including threats to their professional licenses for engaging historical or current day topics of race, inequity and injustice. In this article, we first draw on CRT to analyze how CRT-bans leverage white defensiveness and white comfort to restrict instruction and discourse about systemic racism, thereby upholding it. Second, we describe a mixed methods research study with 117 teachers across the US that provides an initial look at how teachers are being harmed by these bans. The data suggests that CRT-bans are negatively impacting the racial climate of schools and contributing to the systematic pushout of teachers, particularly those committed to equity and inclusion. In addition to capturing teachers’ experiences about the bans, we specifically examine the pressure teachers are experiencing and its exacerbation of an already national problem, teacher attrition. We end the article with evidence-based recommendations on ways schools might mitigate the harm of CRT-bans on teachers.

Keywords: *critical race theory, critical race scholars, counterstorytelling, possibility, affirmative action, critical race praxis*

In May, 2021, Matt Hawn, a white high school teacher of 16 years, was fired from his job in Kingsport, Tennessee for telling his nearly all-white class that white privilege is “a fact.” The district had received claims he was teaching Critical Race Theory (CRT); although Hawn asserted that he had never heard of the theory prior to the accusations, he was let go (Natanson, 2021).

In March, 2022, Kim Morrison, a white fourth-year high school English teacher, was dismissed from her job in Greenfield, Missouri, through a school board vote. She was accused of teaching CRT, despite confirming that CRT was not something she knew or understood (Riley, 2022).

In the spring of 2022, Lakeisha Patterson, a Black elementary school teacher in Pasadena, Texas was interviewed about the impacts of a state law, passed at the start of the school year, that was driven by CRT rhetoric and prevents teachers from discussing controversial issues or concepts that may cause “discomfort, guilt [or] anguish.” Patterson said, “I felt like they [are] silencing our voices...[and] questioning the integrity of teachers....And now you have teachers who are afraid to even touch on certain topics” (Steinberg, 2022).

Over the past year, sweeping local and state-wide policies have emerged that restrict how race and racism can be taught in K-12 schools across the nation. In a predominantly white and

monolingual profession, where educators are under-equipped by teacher preparation programs and professional development to discuss and navigate issues of racial inequity and racism (Kohli, 2021; Matias, 2016b, Staples, 2015), many schools are already dominated by state standards and district-issued curricula that center Eurocentric history, literature, and perspectives (Au et al., 2016; Vasquez Heilig et al., 2012; Muhammad, 2019), and policies that reinforce the racial status quo of inequity (Epstein & Gist, 2015; Picower & Mayorga, 2015; Price-Dennis & Sealy-Ruiz, 2021). Now, schools are increasingly becoming a place where teachers face interpersonal and professional risk for teaching about US racial realities, including threats to their professional licenses for engaging historical or current day topics of race, inequity, and injustice. Although much of the discourse about CRT-bans has centered on students, teachers are in fact a target of many anti-CRT laws and policies, and these shifts are impacting their retention, which is already a major professional and policy concern (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2019; Gist, 2018; Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022).

In 2014, a national poll on occupational stress found that close to half of teachers reported high levels of daily stress; teaching was tied with nursing as the most stressful occupation (Gallup, 2014). By 2022, the pandemic has exacerbated teacher stress (Kush, et. al, 2022), resulting in mass resignations and rampant vacancies across schools and districts (Varghese, 2022). K-12 educators already work within (and seldom see change in) a system designed to produce and reproduce inequities along racial lines, a working condition that is especially stressful and threatens the retention of Black Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) teachers (Gist, et. al, 2021; Kohli, 2018, 2021; Pizarro & Kohli, 2019). CRT-bans contribute to the complexity and pressure teachers face navigating their profession, adding on the fear of teaching the wrong topic through the censorship of longstanding curriculum and the policing of pedagogy.

Although CRT is not often taught in elementary and secondary schools, it does provide a useful framework for understanding how the anti-CRT movement—at the local, state, and federal policy level, and in media coverage of school events—has come about. In this article, we first draw on CRT to analyze how CRT-bans leverage white defensiveness and white comfort to restrict instruction and discourse about systemic racism, thereby upholding it. Second, we describe a mixed methods research study with 117 teachers across the US that provides an initial look at how teachers are being harmed by these bans and suggests that CRT-bans are negatively impacting the racial climate of schools and contributing to the systematic pushout of teachers, particularly those committed to equity and inclusion. We end the article with evidence-based recommendations on ways schools might mitigate the harm of CRT-bans on teachers.

What Actually *is* Critical Race Theory and How is it Useful?

Racism is the creation and/or maintenance of racial hierarchies and racial inequities supported through institutionalized power (Solorzano et al., 2002). CRT is a theoretical framework that emerged in the 1970s from critical legal scholars working to make visible the racism embedded in laws and institutions (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). According to Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995), it is an expansive theory unified by two defining threads. First, it guides an exploration of “how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America.” It is used “to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as ‘the rule of law’ and ‘equal protection’,” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, xiii) that legitimize the status quo. Second, CRT calls for this

understanding of racialized structures to be paired with action towards disrupting how the law reifies racial power systems (Crenshaw et al., 1995, xiii).

CRT scholars have studied how whiteness is prioritized and elevated to justify ongoing violence toward communities of color. Harris (1993) demonstrates how, in the United States, whiteness is leveraged and enjoyed while being protected like a formal property right within the legal system. Similarly, Gotanda (2004) and others (Lopez, 1997; Moore, 2014; Ross, 1990a) point to the law's construction of white people as innocent—always only abstractly connected to, but not responsible for, the privileges and structures that elevate their status while subordinating and dehumanizing Black people.

In the 1990s, CRT became part of the education landscape. Key critical education scholars borrowed from the legal theory to challenge structural racism within various facets of the U.S. educational system. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) applied Harris' argument that the US is built on property rights over human rights to demonstrate how schools are designed to serve white economic interests through disparate educational opportunities. Solórzano (1997) engaged CRT to disrupt genetic and cultural deficit theories that feed racial stereotypes and are used to justify how teachers see and act towards Black, Latina/o/x, and Indigenous students.

CRT in education has helped scholars and practitioners understand and challenge racial injustices within curriculum (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Valencia, 2010; Yosso, 2002), resources (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Pollack & Zirkel, 2013), and discipline (Annamma et al., 2019; Dutil, 2020). It has also been used to uncover how systemic racism contributes to an unhealthy racial climate guided by policies and practices that ultimately serve to pushout students of color (Kim et. al, 2010; Tuck, 2012), and teachers, particularly teachers of color fighting for a more just education system (Fultz, 2004; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; Kohli, 2018). We intentionally use the term pushout to reframe the idea that students “dropout” or teachers simply leave schools by their own will; instead, it acknowledges that the educational system is constructed to impede their success and inclusion (Fine 1991; Kohli, 2018; 2021; Tuck, 2012).

CRT has also been utilized for decades to understand how schooling structures (policies, practices, norms) contribute to the perpetuation of white supremacy (e.g., Bell, 2004; Kohli, 2021; Perez Huber, 2011; Yosso, 2013). Part of this work has focused on the dynamics of white defensiveness that work to undermine racial justice. For example, Leonardo and Porter (2010) engage CRT to argue how safe spaces for racial dialogue are violent toward students of color when they prioritize the comfort of white people. Matias (2014) uses CRT to theorize on the socially constructed, relational nature of white racial emotion within a white supremacist society that falsely presents emotions as individualized, unraced, and normative. Scholars have also expanded this understanding to explore how white emotionalities recycle power relations (e.g., Ahmed, 2004; Matias et al., 2016), and undermine antiracist education (e.g., Applebaum, 2017; DiAngelo, 2011; Matias & DiAngelo, 2013). Collectively, this scholarship sheds light on how *white defensiveness*—emotive responses of white people to discourse on racism that serve as a barrier to accountability, and *white comfort*—the option that white people have to ignore white normativity—are embedded within the logics of a legal system that contributes to the fortification of white supremacy (Freeman, 1995, p. 29).

Our use of “white defensiveness” is aligned with CRT’s legacy of challenging white normativity and is a rejection of the white fragility framing. While “white fragility” has become a popular term for naming the overt ways white people emotionally resist racialized discussions—including anger, crying, physically leaving, or (more subtly) silence, guilt, and withdrawal (DiAn-

gelo, 2011)—DiAngelo's theorizing fails to recognize such emoting as a performance of invulnerability (as opposed to vulnerability) (Applebaum, 2017). We use "white defensiveness" to describe the range of emotive responses that ultimately support white people to victimize themselves and police emotions of people of color (Accapadi, 2007), to engage in a performance of false empathy and care (Matias & Zembylas, 2014), and/or to justify apathy toward issues of racism (Forman, 2004). Similarly, we use "white comfort" to describe the option that white people have to simultaneously learn and ignore white normativity (Mills, 2007), facilitated by their avoidance of vulnerability (Applebaum, 2017) and racialized emotions (Matias, 2016a).

A legacy of critical race scholarship in both the law and the field of education teaches us to see CRT-bans as a structural strategy: they leverage a legal system and social norms that cater to white defensiveness and white comfort, to facilitate the creation and maintenance of inequitable schooling structures that harm communities of color. In the section that follows, we trace the lineage of the ban's language and analyze the narratives constructed about them, building from analysis that first appeared in Jayakumar's (2022) introduction to a special issue about CRT in *Philosophy and Theory in Higher Education*.

CRT Analysis of CRT-Bans

On May 18, 2021, a white community member at a school board meeting in Forsyth County, Georgia angrily decried the inclusion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the curriculum, stating, "If you have materials that you are providing where it says, 'if you were born a white male you were born an oppressor,' you are abusing our children." Although the district insisted it was just trying to promote a welcoming and inclusive environment to students of all races, this CRT opponent was followed by numerous parents in agreement, one who argued, "The DEI program is a trojan horse that will bring in a slippery slope. A slippery slope that will ultimately end in Critical Race Theory, white repentance, and the McDonaldisation of America's students." (11Alive, 2021). Nine days later, the school board released a statement, "Forsyth County Schools does not and will not teach, nor promote, Critical Race Theory" (Kerns, 2021).

At this writing, nearly 200 bills banning "CRT" and related "divisive concepts" have been proposed across 40 states (PEN America, 2022). Few bills mention CRT by name (Johnson et al., 2022); however, given how rarely CRT is taught in undergraduate education, much less K-12 schools, such claims would not likely hold up in courts of law. The anti-CRT strategy is what Patricia Williams calls "definitional theft" (Cobb, 2021) and Kimberlé Crenshaw calls the creation of a "boogeyman" (Hatzipanagos, 2021). The creators of the anti-CRT narrative, such as Christopher Rufo (Wallace-Wells, 2021), admit, and even gloat, on Twitter about the racial gaslighting they are doing: they are using "CRT" as a decoy to block teaching about the history of racism and DEI efforts in general.

CRT-bans are part of a political and increasingly state-sanctioned movement rooted in white supremacy. Many CRT-bans borrow language from an executive order by the Trump administration to ban all federally funded diversity trainings (Johnson et al., 2022). The order and the bans that borrow its language prohibit "divisive concepts," such as the concept that "the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist" or the notion that "an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex," or anything that might elicit "discomfort, guilt, or anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of [a person's] race or sex (Exec. Order No. 13,950, 2020, p. 436)." Teachers who want to discuss race or racism are framed as indoctrinating students into such

“race and sex stereotyping and scapegoating (Exec. Order No. 13,950, 2020, p. 433),” when, really, students are already being indoctrinated into race and gender stereotypes through Eurocentric and white-centered curriculum (Matias 2016b). This deceptive misattribution, which draws on white defensiveness and white comfort, is central to the gaslighting of anti-CRT narratives, promoted by Fox News, politicians, and policymakers.

Informed by CRT as our conceptual framework, we argue that the bans similarly claim that white people and men are the ones victimized by efforts to raise awareness of racism and sexism. In effect, this codifies white comfort, while silencing challenges to racism and sexism. It protects the centrality and primacy of their perspective. In the end, then, these efforts are about denying the lived experiences of BIPOC students and communities, ignoring, and distorting the racialized truth of U.S. history and society, and ultimately, leaving white supremacy unchecked.

Another strategy of the anti-CRT legislation is to attack teachers and suppress racial literacies, what Harvard law professor Lani Guinier (2004) defined as “the capacity to decipher the durable racial grammar that structures racialized hierarchies and frames the narrative of our republic” (p. 100). Many bans include a list of right and wrong beliefs, acceptable and unacceptable books and materials. While the executive order listed beliefs that federal workers and contractors could no longer espouse or be presented with, more recently, anti-CRT legislation has honed in on the banning of history and literature in schools, collectively blocking libraries and classrooms from including over one thousand book titles (African American Policy Forum, 2022). For example, *New Kid*, a text that simply featured Black characters, was banned from school libraries in Texas this past year (Cronin, 2021). And in Florida’s Osceola County, the school district canceled a teacher professional development that had been held annually about the civil rights movement (Meckler & Natanson, 2022). An Oklahoma teacher is preparing to resign after being attacked and placed on leave for sharing a free, publicly available link to the Brooklyn Public Library, where students could access books currently banned in their home state (Singer, 2022).

These bans on historical truths and racialized realities of communities of color seek to censor and police teachers from advancing students’ racial literacies in schools, and public districts are condoning and engaging in these processes. They claim to protect teachers from a supposed harm that CRT is creating, while in actuality, they exert control over the labor of teachers whose reality in the classroom is different than the false narratives being told. In this way, the policies—and media narratives about the policies—contribute to a kind of ambient racial gaslighting: the “political, social, economic and cultural process that perpetuates and normalizes a white supremacist reality through pathologizing those who resist” (Davis & Ernst, 2019, p. 47; see also Davis & Ernst, 2011; Matias & Newlove, 2017; Ruíz, 2020). Moreover, even in places where bans haven’t yet been established, anti-CRT legislation and efforts have threatened the job security of teachers if they teach topics of race and privilege. Anti-CRT legislation and efforts are a manipulation of white backlash to strategically make a battleground out of racially relevant education and attack those who attempt to deliver it; namely, teachers (Wallace-Wells, 2021).

Empirical Methods

Given the current political context and climate, in this article, we wanted to systematically understand how teachers are making sense of anti-CRT bans. Through an analysis of survey and questionnaire data collected with K-12 teachers across the country, we explore how a range of teachers perceive and have been impacted by actual or pending legislative bans.

Participants

This study is part of a larger collaborative research project on CRT-bans conducted by Sophie Trawalter and the first author.¹ We recruited 185 K-20 educators via Prolific, an online platform for recruiting participants for online studies. We launched data collection on May 2, 2022, and ended data collection on May 24, 2022, due to the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, TX, to be sensitive to educators' mental health; we did not want to ask teachers about professional stress in the wake of this tragic event. Of the 185 educators, 117 reported working in the K-12 schools. Among these K-12 educators, 56% were women, 16% were teachers of Color, and the mean age was 37.9 with a *SD* of 10.41. The average educator self-identified as liberal, $M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.15$, though educators spanned the political spectrum from 1-*Very liberal* to 5-*Very conservative*. This is reflective of the general political views of teachers at large, where a minority of teachers identify as conservative (Kline, 2017). Educators came from across the U.S. See Appendix Table 1 for states represented in the sample, and whether those states had an anti-CRT ban.

Procedure and Research Approach

Participants completed an online survey that included a series of questions, including questions about factors associated with attrition, studied under the label of “burnout.” We acknowledge that the concept of “burnout” is limited in that it attributes attrition factors to internal sources, as opposed to recognizing the myriad of external sources responsible for “pushing out” teachers (Kohli, 2021).

Still, we utilize an established “Teacher Burnout Scale” (Richmond et al., 2001) for the purpose of contributing to legal advocacy, given that teacher burnout is the label recognized as a significant policy concern. This approach is described by Mari Matsuda as having a “dualist approach” to advocacy, driven by a “multiple consciousness” that intentionally operates both within the demarcations of what is legislatively legible and toward oppressed community knowledge and advocacy (Matsuda, 1989). It is also referred to as Critical Race Praxis in educational research (Yamamoto, 1997; Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015; Stovall, et al., 2009).

To assess burnout/pushout, participants rated their agreement with statements such as, *My job doesn't excite me anymore*, and *I am weary with all of my job responsibilities*, on a scale from 1-*Strongly disagree* to 5-*Strongly agree*. Attrition questions were followed by questions about factors associated with retention: their desire to seek another job. Specifically, they were asked: *Would you consider taking another job in another state?* And, if so, *Would you consider taking a job in a state with a ban (or attempts to pass a ban) on 'critical race theory'?* Participants answered these questions on a scale from 1-*Definitely no* to 5-*Definitely yes*. In addition, we included survey questions that asked participants, *Has your state passed a ban on 'Critical Race Theory' in public education?* Of the 117 educators in our sample, 25 said yes and 92 said no. We also collected information on what state they currently live in, so we could observe whether there are bans or bans under way. As expected, educators who were in ban states were significantly more likely to

1. The larger ongoing project includes an experiment design where participants were primed to focus or not focus on CRT bans before filling out the survey. More specifically, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the Experimental Condition, they read an article about Critical Race Theory bans in education. In the Control Condition, they did not read this article. This is not a part of the analysis for this article. In addition, the survey included many more questions not included in this analysis, including questions about racial climate that the research team plans to analyze and publish in future articles.

report that they were in a ban state, $t(115) = 3.53, p = .0006$. In other words, educators seem aware of the situation in their state, something that also comes through in their qualitative responses.

Limitations

We note that these analyses are exploratory, a first pass at assessing educators' reactions to the bans. The design of the broader study allows us to document a relationship between bans/proposed bans, on the one hand, and teacher's professional lives and retention. The data do not allow for strong causal inferences, which we do not claim to make. Still, we think the relationship we capture with the current data reflect a real relationship, one that may well generalize to other educators, outside of our sample. At the very least, the data provide an existence proof: for many teachers, these bans are harmful.

CRT-Bans Harm School Climate

Of the 117 K-12 teacher sample, 100% wrote in answers to open-ended questions that solicited their opinions on CRT ("How do you feel about bans on 'Critical Race Theory' in public education?" and "In what ways have the bans impacted you?"). Of those individuals, most (roughly 79%) characterized the bans as negative for education and society. Participants pointed to several reasons when describing their discontent with the bans, including the bans being a political strategy used by conservative political officials, CRT not being taught at the K-12 level, and the bans being harmful to marginalized populations. The descriptive qualitative findings from this data suggest that CRT-bans have a negative impact on the professional climate of teaching.

All liberal identifying participants disagreed with the notion that "bans are ok or good." Eight liberal identifying participants who disagreed with the bans cited the way the bans limit teachers' autonomy and are harmful to students of color. More specifically, they lamented that while CRT is not taught in K-12, the bans work to limit any conversations about race and racism in the classroom. They stated that these limits would cultivate an ignorance of a racialized structuring of society and work against efforts to fight against racial injustice. For example, a white, somewhat liberal identifying woman, who was a teacher of six years in Texas stated:

I think banning Critical Race Theory would actually serve to REDUCE freedom, as politicians attempt to micromanage educators at all levels of K-12 education - quite ironic. I also think it reduces freedom in the sense that Black people will be further oppressed, if a generation is unable to learn about actual race relations in this country.

The overwhelming majority of teachers in our study believe the bans are politically manipulative. Some (17) participants in this study described CRT in K-12 as "a make-believe problem" created by right-wing politicians to earn votes in a political power struggle. While others (23 participants) named conservatives or the Republican party specifically as targeting Critical Race Theory and using it as a political weapon in what one participant labeled as a "bad-faith culture war." They describe it as a narrative of fear that has been built around topics of race and racism in order to "whitewash" America's past in an attempt to avoid accountability. For example, a White, very liberal identifying man teacher of 20 years, currently in South Dakota, described the issue as a facade:

I think [the bans] are an overreaction to a problem that doesn't exist. They are a cynical targeting of a marginalized group for the purpose of grabbing more political power by those who are already in charge.

Another participant, a Black very liberal identifying man, who was a teacher of 12 years, currently in Georgia, broke the façade down further:

As a Black man, I think it's silly. Systemic discrimination and racism are already taught and studied outside of CRT. In addition, I have never heard of CRT being taught in public schools or private schools for people under the age of 18. I have only seen it taught in Black Studies classrooms at colleges and universities. It's not a threat. Finally, the concept was created by academic heavyweights who are highly respected and well published. They are Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams. Finally, Derrick Bell's book on CRT has been around since 1973, why is it a problem 48 years later?

Participants attested that these narratives exist to gain conservative politicians political points as they spearhead the attempt to ban "CRT" in K-12 schooling, even while CRT itself is not usually part of K-12 curriculum.

Almost 10% of those stating the bans are bad for education and society believed that the bans on CRT are negatively impacting the teaching professionals as a whole. These beliefs about agenda pushing and the bans' negative impact on teaching connect to a larger idea that the bans on CRT across the United States are only a single strategy in a more extensive operation to defund and demean public education. This concern is exemplified in an assertion by a white, very liberal identifying man, who was a teacher of nine years in Minnesota. He stated:

I think [the bans are] ridiculous. Schools haven't taught this up until the college level, and it's just something that the republicans want to have control over. They're trying to get teachers fired so that they can keep gutting education.

Similarly, a white somewhat liberal identifying woman, who was a teacher of six years in Texas, asserted:

They're an absurd means of demonizing public education and pandering to far-right voters. There is nothing real here to legislate against, first of all because Critical Race Theory is a primarily a fairly complex concept that is really only taught to students at a college level, second, because there is nothing 'oppressive' or inherently guilt-inducing about Critical Race Theory, it is simply a way of informing students about the structural racism that is built into much of our government law and institutions as a result of hundreds of years of racism and the fact that our government was founded when slavery was still a perfectly legal institution in the US.

Many participants' pointed to political fabrication, based on their understanding that CRT is not actually taught in K-12 schools. Nearly one-third of participants (31 out of 106) asserted that the claim of Critical Race Theory being taught at the K-12 level is a purposeful spread of misinformation. Some understand Critical Race Theory as a graduate-level critical theory rather than a

teaching strategy used at the primary and secondary education levels, as exemplified by the following assertion by a white very liberal identifying woman, who was a teacher of five years in Georgia:

It sounds to me like a buzzword scare tactic. Also I'm not sure there's a need to have an opinion on CRT in schools, because my understanding is that CRT is a college level course and no grade school is actually teaching this stuff. Overall I think that this whole CRT thing is meant to help extremist conservatives whitewash the teaching of history.

There are implications for the stress and manipulation brought on by CRT-bans. Perhaps most strikingly, the majority (54%) of those responding to the question “Would you consider taking a job in a state with a ban (or attempts to ban) on ‘critical race theory’?” indicated they would likely not consider the job. But the data also suggests an impact on quality of life in the profession and racial climate in schools, especially for teachers who identify as politically liberal.

In the study, there were a minority of teachers who did align with the anti-CRT agenda and were committed to maintaining a race-evasive environment. In line with the fear-stoking, politically-driven narrative being built around CRT, several white teacher participants (ranging from “very conservative” to “somewhat liberal” political orientations) indicated that they “do have worries about teaching CRT in the classroom,” specifically around the potential of bringing unwarranted shame and guilt to both white students and students of color. For example, a white moderate identifying woman teacher of 22 years, currently in Colorado, noted:

Though I am white, my immediate family are not. I don't know anyone in my immediate surroundings who feels Critical Race Theory is a “good” idea. No one wants to be told the most important part of their being is the color of their skin. No one wants to be told they are the poor little brown kid who will have a hard time doing anything in life. Is racism a problem in America—yes, in some parts more prevalently. I don't believe that CRT is the answer to this issue though.

Conservative identifying teachers were especially convinced of the narrative of CRT as causing undue psychological distress and harm to white students. Although conservative teachers made up only 10% of the sample, 67% of those conservative identifying participants that actually acknowledged the presence of racism and a significant need to teach history accurately in the United States, still simultaneously saw CRT as a problem. It was also mostly conservative leaning participants that justified their concern about CRT being taught, out of a protection for white student comfort. Five participants in particular wrote in comments expressing their view that CRT leads to psychological discomfort and/or shame among white students. For example, a white moderate identifying teacher of three years in Pennsylvania who is a woman, stated about her feelings toward CRT-bans: “I think that it is a good idea on principal [sic], but that it needs to be clear so that teachers can teach history still--just without making students of caucasian or white ethnicity feel depressed or guilty for their ancestors...” Such comments map onto the white backlash politics of appeals to white defensiveness and comfort that were embedded in Trump's executive order and now being concretized through CRT-bans. Despite these opinions, however, only 13% of participants (15 total) indicated that the “bans are ok or good.”

Teachers are Experiencing Burnout/Pushout

To explore the impacts of bans on educators, we examined burnout/pushout and educators' desire to change jobs as a function of whether they report living in a ban state (yes v. no). We control for race (BIPOC vs. not) and ideology. We do not formally test for interactions with these variables due to insufficient power; we have relatively low numbers of BIPOC educators ($n = 19$) and conservative educators ($n = 13$). For the same reason, we do not test interactions between condition and whether educators live in a ban state.

The burnout scale scores ranged from 1 to 4.2 out of 5, with a mean of 2.12 and standard deviation of .75. In other words, educators reported burnout/pushout below the midpoint of the scale, indicating slight disagreement with items describing burnout/pushout. Still, there was a range, with some educators reporting very high levels of burnout/pushout. Notably, educators who reported being in a ban state reported *more* burnout/pushout than educators not in ban states. See Table 1.

Teachers are Considering Leaving their Schools

Responses to the questions, Would you consider taking another job in another state? and Would you consider taking a job in a state with a ban (or attempts to pass a ban) on “critical race theory”? ranged from 1 (Definitely no) to 5 (Definitely yes) with a mean of 2.67, $SD = 1.20$, and 2.54, $SD = 1.29$, respectively. Here, note that participants reported a greater likelihood of taking a job in another state than taking another job in a state with a ban, $t(59) = 5.81, p < .0001$, suggesting that bans might, on the whole, make it more difficult to recruit educators. In percentages, 50% of participants said they would maybe, probably, or definitely consider taking another job. Of those, 75.2% said that they would not take a job in a ban state. Moreover, we find that participants who reported being in a ban state were more likely to report wanting to take another job. See Table 1.

Table 1. Test of Statistics

| | Burnout/Pushout | Other job? | Job in a ban state? |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Self-reported ban state: | $B = .33, SE = .17$ | $B = .83, SE = .26$ | $B = -.30, SE = .34$ |
| Yes (1) vs. no (0) | $t(113) = 1.99$ $p = .049^*$ | $t(113) = 3.21$ $p = .002^{**}$ | $t(55) = -.89$ $p = .377$ |

Note: Regression analyses of burnout/pushout, desire to take another job, and desire to take another job in a ban state as a function of ban state status (self-reported), controlling for race (BIPOC vs. not) and ideology (1-5). $^{**} < .01$, $^* < .05$

Discussion

Nationally, conservative educators make up a minority in K-12 public schools (Klein, 2017). The teachers in our dataset reflect the broader political sphere of educators, and most opposed CRT-bans. Those who align with the bans tended to identify with conservative political ideologies, expressing comments reflective of CRT ban propaganda that has been strategically implemented starting with Trump's executive order and now with legislation (or threat thereof) in 40 states. The data also reflect significant numbers of progressive and liberal teachers who are

aware of the manipulation, don't agree with bans, and are experiencing a negative impact on their teaching and retention.

The quantitative data, in particular, demonstrates that bans contribute to teachers' burnout/pushout and their desire to take another job in another state. As our findings reveal, the majority of teachers are experiencing additional pressure and stress in the wake of legislative bans that feel like a deceptive attack on education and teacher's autonomy in making the best pedagogical choices for their students. Most of the teachers in our study name what is underlying the bans—calling it out as whitewashing history, bad faith cultural wars, and buzz-word scare tactics from the extreme right.

Fighting against the negative impact of bans will require that school districts as well as school leaders and personnel—not only teachers but administrators—are capable and committed to naming and appropriately responding to the ways in which racism is enacted through schooling policies, practices, and norms. In the recommendation section ahead, we connect our findings to the importance of supporting teachers, and racial literacies in schools, to ultimately ensure healthy learning conditions for BIPOC students and their white peers.

Recommendations

Teaching is already a profession characterized by significant stress and subject to high rates of turnover. While the education of future generations is dependent on this community of professionals, teachers are underpaid and tasked with a great deal of responsibility with limited resources, as exemplified and exacerbated during the global pandemic of 2020. K-12 schools are currently operating with unprecedented vacancies, and districts are scrambling to cover classes, stretching already thin resources thinner. These problems are more prominent in districts serving working class, students of color—leaving the most underserved students even more underserved.

It is within this context that conservative groups are advocating for changes to curriculum that restrict discussions of racial injustice, and the historical and current realities of racial inequity. As seen through the data analyzed in this paper, this has an impact on the professional stability and wellbeing of teachers. Most of the teachers in our study were not only aware of the deceptiveness of the bans, but also seemed to be enduring additional stress and emotional labor contributing to factors associated with experiencing burnout/pushout of the profession. Based on our findings, we offer several research grounded recommendations drawn from the literature on K-12 schools, teachers, and teacher education. These recommendations can support districts and schools to mitigate the stress that our data suggests teachers are enduring:

1. Districts and schools must maintain their commitments to serving all students.

Minoritized communities have fought for decades to be more visible in the curriculum (Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan Andrade, 2021), and for years, research has demonstrated that education is far more effective when it is culturally responsive and sustaining, and students can use the curriculum to make sense of their world (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017). In this study, the majority of teachers surveyed felt that CRT-bans are harming education and society, and they acknowledged that there is a significant need in U.S. schools to teach accurate history, including discourse on racism. As students of color comprise over half of students in US public schools, and racism is a reality in their lives, pandering to white conservative minority factions that want to suppress discussions of race and inequity is not in the best interests of students

of color. In fact, it is a blatant exploitation of the resources that states, districts, and schools receive to oversee education. Districts and schools must instead maintain their commitments to serving all students by recognizing that a free and appropriate education includes narratives and history reflective of the past and current realities of students of color.

2. Districts and school administrators should create supportive climates for teachers.

Teachers are one of schools' biggest resources, and it is important that teachers feel they have the space, resources, and support to effectively teach young people in all their diverse identities. Yet most of the teachers we surveyed indicated added pressure from "CRT" bans contributed to their burnout/pushout from the profession. Creating a supportive climate for teachers who are enduring an already high stress and high stakes profession means trusting them as professional experts and supporting their decisions to include curriculum reflective of students' realities with racial inequity, which proposed and adopted legislation have put on the chopping block.

3. Districts and schools should commit to strengthening their collective racial literacy.

Racial literacy is the capacity to identify and disrupt racism on both interpersonal and structural levels (Guinier, 2004). Much like any type of literacy, racial literacy is strengthened by practice and engagement (Price-Dennis & Sealy-Ruiz, 2021; Sealy-Ruiz, 2013). As we saw in the introductory example, even when school boards and district administrators are trying to maintain a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, they do not always have the language and skills to navigate the pressure of parents who are fear-mongering or are promoting false racial narratives. Without a strong understanding of racism, inequity, diversity, and inclusion and how to stay accountable to these principles, districts often default to sweeping language that can restrict the capacity of teachers to effectively serve students. It is important that districts and schools provide the training and resources to its staff so there is a collective understanding that can guide policy decisions so they can stand with their students and teachers.

Conclusion

In this paper, we explored how CRT-bans came about and how K-12 teachers across the country are feeling about and being impacted by actual or pending legislative bans. Given that teacher retention is an ongoing national problem, in addition to capturing teachers' thoughts about the bans, we specifically examine the pressure teachers are experiencing as related to the likelihood of them leaving their jobs. These findings are relevant to future legal efforts to challenging existing state bans—such as those efforts being prepared by the American Federation of Teachers on behalf teachers who “get in trouble for teaching honest history” (Headly, 2021), and the first federal lawsuit against bans filed by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the American Civil Liberties Union, and others, challenging Oklahoma's classroom censorship bill HB 1775 (Crawford, 2021). This study is among the first to empirically explore the impact of CRT-bans, showing that they stand to harm teachers and the teaching profession during a national teacher shortage

(Varghese, 2022). The extant literature suggests that harms identified in this study are likely exacerbated for teachers of color, thus having implications for their recruitment, well-being in the profession, and retention; all of which have been identified as essential to supporting the success and well-being of a growing population of students of color. The harm extends to white teachers and communities as well—including those teachers and students' parents standing up in school board meetings decrying victimization and psychological harms of racially responsible content in K-12 schools. Yet their victimization narrative, rooted in white defensiveness, like the anti-CRT movement itself, is a racial spectacle that serves to obfuscate how white supremacist state power, including schooling structures, dehumanize and disenfranchise students of color as well as poor whites (Davis & Ernst, 2019). This is why we have argued that CRT-bans and the underlying movement that they push forward amount to racial gaslighting: they claim to prevent harm by a CRT boogeyman, while actively inflicting harm in the not-so-subtle background that is denied at every turn. The real agenda of the legislation is to assert state-sanctioned control over education, stoke white defensiveness, and to reinforce the existing race-evasive curriculum. This study provides empirical evidence that shines a light on harm to teachers and the profession that is already transpiring from the looming threat of CRT-bans. It provides empirically based hope in showing that most teachers are aware of what the anti-CRT movement attempts to obfuscate. And finally, we recommend supporting teachers and healthy climate, and argue for the power of racial literacies in equipping K-12 teachers in challenging and successfully navigating through the racial gaslighting currently underway.

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Appendix

Table 1: Number of Participants From Each State and Status of Anti-CRT Bans in Those States

| State | N | CRT Ban Proposed? | CRT Ban passed? | State | N | CRT Ban Proposed? | CRT Ban passed? | | |
|---|----|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|---|-------------------|-----------------|--|--|
| Alabama | 1 | Y | Y | Montana | 0 | Y | Y | | |
| Alaska | 1 | Y | Y | Nebraska | 0 | Y | Y | | |
| Arizona | 5 | Y | Y | Nevada | 0 | Y | N | | |
| Arkansas | 0 | Y | Y | New Hampshire | 0 | Y | Y | | |
| California | 13 | N | N | New Jersey | 2 | Y | N | | |
| Colorado | 2 | Y | Y | New Mexico | 1 | Y | N | | |
| Connecticut | 1 | N | N | New York | 7 | Y | N | | |
| Delaware | 1 | N | N | North Carolina | 6 | Y | Y | | |
| Florida | 11 | Y | Y | North Dakota | 0 | Y | Y | | |
| Georgia | 3 | Y | Y | Ohio | 7 | Y | Y | | |
| Hawaii | 0 | N | N | Oklahoma | 0 | Y | Y | | |
| Idaho | 0 | Y | Y | Oregon | 4 | Y | N | | |
| Illinois | 3 | N | N | Pennsylvania | 8 | Y | N | | |
| Indiana | 0 | Y | Y | Rhode Island | 0 | Y | N | | |
| Iowa | 2 | Y | Y | South Carolina | 0 | Y | Y | | |
| Kansas | 1 | Y | Y | South Dakota | 1 | Y | Y | | |
| Kentucky | 1 | Y | Y | Tennessee | 3 | Y | Y | | |
| Louisiana | 2 | Y | Y | Texas | 9 | Y | Y | | |
| Maine | 1 | Y | N | Utah | 0 | Y | Y | | |
| Maryland | 3 | N | N | Vermont | 1 | N | N | | |
| Massachusetts | 2 | N | N | Virginia | 1 | Y | Y | | |
| Michigan | 4 | Y | N | Washington | 0 | Y | N | | |
| Minnesota | 0 | Y | N | West Virginia | 0 | Y | Y | | |
| Mississippi | 2 | Y | Y | Wisconsin | 4 | Y | N | | |
| Missouri | 3 | Y | N | Wyoming | 1 | Y | N | | |
| Note: This table reports state-level (not district-level) bans at the time of the study, and whether they were passed. For updated data, see the following sources: | | | | | | | | | |
| https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06 | | | | | | | | | |
| https://crtforward.law.ucla.edu/ | | | | | | | | | |

Affirming Black Sociality in a time of anti-CRT Legislation, White Emotionality, & Immunitary Whiteness

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Abstract

This article uses white emotionality to critically conceptualize recent legislative efforts to ban the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT). This undertaking is theoretically motivated by immunitary whiteness and is methodologically informed by Black whiteness studies, particularly the importance of W. E. B Du Bois' reflections on education. These reflections form the basis for biopolitical interrogations of how the current moment negates but might otherwise affirm educational life. The former is analyzed both historically by the Kanawha County textbook controversy of 1974 and presently through Florida's 2021 change to the state's Required Instruction Planning and Reporting statute. Toward the latter, this article posits Black sociality as way of affirming educational life against present-historical negations embodied by the current wave of anti-CRT legislation.

Keywords: *Black sociality, white emotionality, immunitary whiteness, educational biopolitics, anti-CRT legislation*

Introduction: Locating White Emotionality

Despite continuing claims that America is a postracial, egalitarian polity, there should be no doubt that the US is a *Herrenvolk* democracy (Mills, 1988) governed by a Racial Contract (Mills, 1997). Recent white supremacists' actions, punctuated by the Unite the Right rally held in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 and the Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021, substantiate this sociopolitical reality while also demonstrating that violent displays of white emotionality (Matias, 2016a, 2016b) are permissible forms of political speech. This permissibility is attributable to an immunitary whiteness (Cabrera, 2017; Kearl, 2019) that prevents whites from recognizing the present-historical fact that greater value is given to their feelings of discomfort than to the psychic harm and physical injury people of color experience. Mills (2007) describes this asymmetrical epistemic relation as white ignorance. This social epistemology explains how whites both intentionally cognize society through whiteness and purposefully ignore the material reality such cognitions create. Accordingly, white ignorance is predicated on whites actively misrecognizing what they know about themselves and society.

This article argues that recent legislative bans on teaching Critical Race Theory (CRT) reflect a biopolitical weaponizing of white emotionality designed to curricularly codify white ignorance. This argument is conceptualized by immunitary whiteness and through a methodological note on doing Black whiteness studies (Leonardo, 2013). Turning from theoretical and methodo-

logical considerations, this article historically analogizes current anti-CRT legislation to the Kanawha County textbook controversy of 1974, which similarly sought to negatively protect the curricular souls of white children, before concluding by positing Black sociality as way of affirming educational life. Given the present political success of anti-CRT legislation, it is important to ask how education might respond? Any educational response must ask why negative protections of white emotionality succeed and how Black sociality can help education reimagine itself affirmatively?

Locating anti-CRT legislation both historically and alongside recent violent displays of white supremacy highlight how white emotionality increasingly orders both schooling and society. According to Matias (2016a, 2016b), white emotionality recognizes that emotions are epistemically and ontologically real. Institutions like education structure emotions through processes of socialization within which feelings are governed by a racial hierarchy that privileges the emotional comfort of whites (especially, white men) over the emotional wellbeing of people of color (especially, women of color). “The emotionalities of whiteness are given innate status, whereas the emotionalities of people of Color are rendered both symptom of social construction and innately *unworthy* of humanity” (Matias, 2016a, p. 6). Within this rank ordering of emotionality, whites are allowed to own their emotions whenever there is perceived damage to them and permitted to evade culpability whenever their emotions cause harm and injury to people of color. This affective sleight of hand defines the emotional parameters of white victimhood within education (Zembylas, 2021).

White emotionality exists along an affective terrain within which whites tend to remain unparadoxically emotionally frozen and perpetually angry about being made to feel anything related to racism. The former is steeped in avoidance; whereas the latter is immersed in claims of “reverse racism” aimed at prioritizing whiteness. Examples of this complementarity include white teacher candidates who, following Love (2019), claim to love all children despite being unwilling to utter the phrase “Black Lives Matter.” Undergirding this claim are unreflective appeals to equality and demonstrably false assertions by future white teachers that they will treat all children the same. Disciplinary data and the fact that students of color, particularly Black students, are proportionally overrepresented within special education disprove the presumed neutrality of such assertions. What these data substantiate is a color-evasiveness (Annamma et al., 2017) that whites utilize to simultaneously affect both avoidance and anger. White emotionality is not only audible in color-evasive claims of race-neutrality but also in angry cries that whites will not be replaced or that the 2020 presidential election was stolen. These vocal affectations of white supremacy call upon whites (especially, white teachers, teacher candidates, and teacher educators) to disinvest from the white imagination because it is “nothing but a false mecca used to shield whiteness and protect against racial realism” (Matias, 2016b, p. 96).

The events introduced above are invitations into the same white imagination that purposefully ignores data which repeatedly proves that white teachers do not, in fact, treat all children the same. Disinvesting from this invitation is critical because once accepted it grants whites a presumed right to angrily demand that the present be undone and that history be remade in an image that protects the emotional integrity of whiteness. Legislation designed to eliminate discussing the historical legacy and present effects of racism embody such efforts. While such efforts are not new to education (Brown & Brown, 2015), what is perhaps unique to the recent wave of anti-CRT legislation are explicit appeals to the emotionality of white children for whom such discussions may cause feelings of discomfort. These bans codify active misrecognitions that pedagogies that expose present-historical logics of whiteness are forms of anti-white racism because they make

white children feel bad. Proponents of such bans render these feelings material before comparing this damage to the harm and injury people of color suffer from whiteness. Within this epistemic-ontological sleight of hand, white feelings can only be prioritized through immunitary protections that purposefully ignore the sociopolitical reality of white supremacy. This rank ordering of emotionality is foundational to *Herrenvolk* democracies, which racially assemble who is human (white) and less-than-human (nonwhite) before dividing society against itself according to these racist determinations (Weheliye, 2104).

Theoretical Framework: Conceptualizing Immunitary Whiteness

Conceptualizing anti-CRT legislation is important for two reasons. First, doing so explicates how education's current survival complex (Love, 2019) negates the lives of students of color and educational life more generally. Secondly, interrogating these bans imagines schooling otherwise, as an antiracist homeplace (hooks, 1990) that affirms Black sociality as inextricable to educational life itself. These two inflective points of educational life encapsulate the emerging field of educational biopolitics (Bourassa, 2018), which is interested in exploring the types of life schooling negates and alternative educational arrangements that might affirm the lives of students of color. These valences of educational biopolitics are, in turn, informed by Esposito's (2008) recasting of Foucauldian biopolitics as an immunity/community relation. The former half of this relation reflects processes of subjection and is associated with negative protections of educational life. Love (2019) describes how schooling negates the educational life of students of color: "I call this the educational survival complex, in which students are left learning to merely survive, learning how schools mimic the world they live in, thus making schools a training site for a life of exhaustion" (p. 27).

Anti-CRT legislation likewise subjects students of color to harm and injury despite advancing claims that no student should be made to feel bad. Such efforts are negative because they can only invest in the educational livelihoods of white children by rendering the educational vitality of children of color, particularly Black children, disposable. To paraphrase Foucault's (1990) original formulation: anti-CRT legislation *fosters* a specific form of educational life (whiteness) while *disallowing* educative vitalities constituted by alternative educational arrangements (e.g., Black sociality) to the point of death. Biopolitical critiques elucidate how racism orders education in ways that are increasingly negative and lethal, but which could be otherwise. Toward the former, Lewis (2009) maps how the eugenic underpinnings of the mental hygiene movement created an immunization paradigm that continues to govern educational life through, for instance, racist applications of deficit thinking. Within this paradigm, racial capitalist schooling leverages intelligence to determine which lives are worthy of educational resources and those that are devoid of future economic value (Pierce, 2017). What results is a biopedagogy that must constantly seek out "pathologies." Extending Esposito (2008), this hunt defines the workings of immunization within education. That is, it demonstrates how schooling preserves lives deemed worthy of educational investment while segregating lives determined to be improper (Bourassa & Margonis, 2017).

As important as these examples of educational biopolitics are, it seems reasonable to ask how present-historical interrogations of educational psychology relate to anti-CRT legislation? Following Bourassa and Margonis (2017), the above examples substantiate how "life is preserved *not* through affirmation, but rather through a subtraction" (p. 618). Interrogations of how educational psychology emerged are helpful because they establish a conceptual link between negative

protections of educational life and the guaranteeing of educational resources. Kears (2019) explores this propertied logic with specific reference to special education to argue that the capacity to request educational resources (i.e., Individualized Education Programs) qualifies oneself as a sovereign individual in possession of oneself. Lockean articulations of property feature prominently within this conceptualization of immunitary whiteness. Of specific interest is the substantiation of a *Herrenvolk* Lockeanism “where whiteness itself becomes property, nonwhites do not fully, or at all, own themselves, and nonwhite labor does not appropriate nature” (Mills, 1997, p. 96). Immunitary whiteness functions through a subtractive logic that denies nonwhites access to the Lockean ideal that one’s body is the first property. This ideal not only defines the contours of neoliberal articulations of individualism but of life itself. Understood as a self-enclosure against community obligations, individualism negatively defines life as whatever is appropriated as one’s own. Following Harris (1993), American jurisprudence continues to recognize this expectation as settled precedent and continually extends this scientific-legal reasoning into the realm of noncorporeal protections of property (e.g., feelings).

Immunitary whiteness argues that education perpetuates this appropriating logic whenever white demands for more/greater educational resources are recognized despite being predicated on subtractive logics that segregate students of color. Applied to anti-CRT legislation, immunitary whiteness not only reveals how the curriculum is increasingly understood to be the exclusive accumulated property of whiteness but how claims that no student should be made to feel bad articulate perceived intrusions to this same property. The Racial Contract instantiates emotional identification with this property as a prerequisite for participation within *Herrenvolk* democracies. Immunitary whiteness negatively protects both schooling and society by enclosing each as proper to whiteness. Immunitary whiteness helps to conceptualize how such negative protections of educational life are justified through an admixture of scientific and legal reasoning which presuppose that whiteness is solely responsible for the wellness of schooling and society rather than an endemic cause of harm and injury to both.

Interrogations of educational psychology, including uses of special education, demonstrate how education fosters a specific form of educational life through subtractions that are predicated on racial hygiene, whether by eugenic science or through legislation designed to cleanse the curriculum of America’s racist past and present. These negative protections increasingly normalize the immunitary capacity of whiteness to operate as a propertied defense against community expropriations. Immunitary whiteness must both continuously hunt for risks to enclose itself against and continually invent new ideations of property damage (e.g., feelings). If education within the emergence of educational psychology was threatened by Black and indigenous populations labeled as “pathological” by eugenic science, the risk to the proper education of white children being articulated by anti-CRT legislation is that such knowledge will devalue whiteness by causing white children to recognize how their present personhood is historically contingent upon Black and Brown lives being made to regularly feel less-than-human across schooling and society. Finally, as the negative valence of educational biopolitics, immunitary whiteness finds common cause with, while also theoretically extending, previous conceptualizations of white immunity (Cabrera, 2017).

A Methodological Note: Doing Black Whiteness Studies

Immunitary whiteness is situated within Matias and Boucher’s (2021) argument that current discussions of white privilege and white fragility obfuscate critical analyses of how people of

color suffer from whiteness. Uncritical Critical Whiteness Studies, or what Matias and Boucher refer to as white whiteness studies, confuse racial awareness (wokeness) with antiracism and instantiate white ignorance as a curricular norm. White whiteness studies pedagogically terminate at making white students aware of their non-knowing and presents this awareness as a successful curricular outcome; whereas pedagogies designed to challenge white ignorance not only ask how and why non-knowing conditions are reproduced but also how these conditions benefit whites and negatively impact the vitality of students of color across schooling and society. The latter requires what Leonardo (2013) describes as Black whiteness studies, that is, pedagogies that do not allow white students to evasively feign ignorance of the harm and injury whiteness causes. Black whiteness studies are vital to rectifying pedagogies which presume the US is a postracial polity that equally distributes benefits and burdens.

Black whiteness studies also utilize Black intellectual thought. With specific reference to biopolitics, Weheliye (2014) argues that it is important to recognize that Blackness has always been concerned with how the US racial polity ignores the present-historical fact that its policies foster whiteness while letting Black life die. Accordingly, slavery—extended through Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and so-called “Stand Your Ground” laws—functions as a primary biopolitical site for recognizing how humanity is racially assembled into human (white) and less-than-human (nonwhite) categories. The central thesis of Weheliye’s critical re-evaluation of biopolitics is that Black life has always existed precariously between life and death given the capacity of racism to dis/allow its very existence. Extending this insight, Pierce (2017) suggests that the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois provide a methodology for doing Black whiteness studies: “schools play a pivotal role within the racializing assemblages that produce unequal forms of life... As such, Du Bois’s work is a point of entry for future work that bridges biopolitical and educational research in highly relevant ways” (p. 27).

Du Bois was keenly aware of educational biopolitics despite writing before the advent of this critical framework. Indeed, following Weheliye (2014), biopolitics articulates a criticality already integral to experiencing Blackness. Take, for example, the following passage from a speech Du Bois (1973/2001) delivered at Fisk University in 1933:

[W]e have to remember that here in America, in the year 1933, we have a situation which cannot be *ignored*...Our education is more and more not only being *confined* to our own schools but to a segregated public school system far below the average of the nation with one-third of our children continuously out of school. And above all, and this we like least to mention, we suffer from a social *ostracism* which is so *deadening* and *discouraging* that we are compelled to either lie about it or to turn our faces toward the red flag of revolution. It consists of the kind of studied and repeated emphasized public insult which during all the long history of the world has led men to kill or be killed. And in the full face of any effort which any black man may make to escape this *ostracism* for himself, stands this flaming sword of racial doctrine which will distract his efforts and *energy* if it does not lead him to *spiritual suicide*. (pp. 120-121; emphasis added)

This passage calls attention to how schooling and society negated Black life by making the newly emancipated Black population into a problem; producing knowledge regimes and institutions to measure, invest, and calculate this problem; and creating technologies of control (i.e., white supremacy) to govern this problem (Pierce, 2017). Du Bois (1973/2001) is describing neg-

ative conditions of social death (ostracism) which render Black life bare across schooling and society. What results from this subtractive logic is a segregated public school system that operates through biopower (confinement) and which (re)produces deadening and discouraging conditions that are disproportionality allocated across the population. Importantly, the US racial polity is aware of these conditions but purposefully ignores them thus disallowing the vital energy of Black life up to the point of death (spiritual suicide). This biopolitically-informed reading might also be understood as a form of Critical Race Hermeneutics (Allen, 2021) in its methodological recognition that racial capitalist schooling is not an unconscious aberration of an otherwise ideal public education system, it a system of education designed to support a *Herrenvolk* democracy.

Disentangling this ideal necessitates interrogating the continuing legacy of white supremacy in America. Mills (1988) suggest that there are four hypotheses for this legacy: (1) the US was never a white supremacist polity; (2) the US was a white supremacist polity prior to, for instance, 1954 without lasting effects; (3) the US was a white supremacist polity prior to 1954 with lasting effects; and (4) despite a shift from de jure to de facto racism, the US continues to be a white supremacist polity (p. 143). Anti-CRT legislation utilize hypothesis 1 (or at minimum a hardline version of hypothesis 2) in claiming that racism should not be discussed because it may cause white children emotional discomfort. Revisiting the Kanawha County textbook controversy lends these hypotheses further explanation. The curricular souls of white children are a hermeneutic key to this understanding. Following Harris (1993), as an inward expression of the self that outwardly substantiates one's humanity, soul functions as a noncorporeal property that negates the educational life of students of color while immunizing white students against community expropriations.

Negations: The Curricular Souls of White Children

Mason (2009) documents how white parents living in Kanawha County, West Virginia in 1974 organized political opposition to a proposed multiracial language arts curriculum out of fear for the souls of "our children" and to protect the nation as a whole. Parents in Kanawha County in 1974 and again today ground their political opposition in the emotionality of white victimhood and feelings of future ideological captivity. Both likewise share a desire to rewrite the present moment while it is still happening in an effort to avoid an apocalyptic future. Mason elaborates: "A white, right-wing invocation of spirituality puts an apocalyptic emphasis on the future, projecting white people forward into a postwhite world only to send them back to the future of avoiding that demise" (p. 151). The Kanawha County textbook controversy is a useful historical analogue for understanding contemporary anti-CRT legislation because it exposes how whiteness biopolitically leverages the curricular souls of white children.

While Mason (2009) argues that the Kanawha County textbook controversy involved a complicated history of how white Appalachian identity was reproduced by an emerging New Right politics, there was nonetheless a particular flashpoint that ignited the most violent curriculum dispute in American history: the inclusion of *Soul on Ice* in a new multiracial language arts curriculum recommended to the Kanawha County Board of Education. Protestors routinely referenced this book to argue that the proposed language arts curriculum was morally degraded and to insist that dialectology alternatives to the existing curriculum and situational ethics were lowering standards. School board member Alice Moore, the face of the protest movement, for example, argued that Booker T. Washington and similar "respectable" Black authors should receive greater curricular attention not only because of the content of their writings but because of their unambiguous and standardized form.

Moving from *Soul on Ice* to the curricular souls of white West Virginian children, Mason (2009) observes how the Kanawha County textbook controversy articulated “an intersection of two cultural traditions of ‘soul’—one pristinely and immanently white, fundamentalist, Appalachian, and Christian, and the other nonetheless pure as a manifestation of an African American aesthetic, black power, and urban social critique” (pp. 159-160). Despite presumptions that the former is eternal, Du Bois (1920/2016) argues that “the discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples is a very modern thing...the world in a sudden, emotional conversion has discovered that it is white and by that token, wonderful!” (p. 17). For Du Bois, the souls of white folk are purposefully structured through an ignorance designed to arouse mental peace and moral satisfaction even as it leaves Black America and people and places colonized by European settlement dead and dying. This ignorance does not happen accidentally. Du Bois was keenly aware that the souls of white folk are reproduced through “the deliberately educated ignorance of white schools” (p. 23). The souls of white folk are not eternally occurring, they are racially assembled through a caste education system that privileges the “white world” while dehumanizing the “dark world” (Pierce, 2017, p. 24). Colonialism, imperialism, and education thus mutually instructed each other in how to hierarchically order schooling and racially govern society.

The emotional conversion Du Bois (1920/2016) identifies gained saliency during the Kanawha County textbook controversy and continues to find ascendancy today through narratives of victimhood and captivity that cast the souls of white folk as the unassailable core of American identity. Within such narratives, political work is a personal conviction, an expression of being called upon to save the soul of the nation. This sense of being called upon explains the entry of conservative Christian leaders, who had previously viewed political and pastoral work separately, into the textbook controversy. These leaders were emotionally converted into political work through a spiritual aligning of the personal and national soul, both of which were immutably white and each of which was being besieged by the proposed multiracial language arts curriculum. The same emotional conversion that moved conservative Christians from the political sidelines also spiritually united working- and middle-class white parents with neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan.

The New Right emerging from this controversy focused on how discourses of cultural assault, religious plight, and spiritual degradation could invoke emotions of white victimhood and national captivity while also evading insinuations that textbook protests were racist: “references to spirituality made the protestors of multiracial curriculum not seem overly political or racial, but only natural—as natural as a parent’s love” (Mason, 2009, p. 158). White parents in 1974 and today share an insistence that they are not racist as well as an apocalyptic belief that both their children’s and America’s soul is being held captive by antiracist pedagogies. In addition to being a hermeneutic key, the curricular souls of white children are a biopolitical hinge that naturalizes parental love as white. Captivity narratives resonated in Kanawha County because residents believed that the proposed multiracial language arts curriculum victimized the moral character and racial purity of white children’s souls. The Kanawha County textbook controversy naturalized white parents protesting to protect “our children” while also normalizing an apocalyptic, *Herren-volk* logic that the souls of white children are the future of America.

While the political success of anti-CRT legislation can be traced to this similitude, there are also important differences. First, the face of today’s movement is not “Sweet Alice” but a self-described political brawler who is less inclined to couch racialized opposition in spiritual rhetoric and more likely to biopolitically weaponize white emotionality. Second, the normalizing of white protest as a natural extension of parental love persists despite inflective changes. If the educational menace in 1974 was external, embodied by Eldridge Cleaver, and perceived as integration and

miscegenation; the curricular peril besieging white children today is internal, embodied by themselves, and perceived as the ontological decline of whiteness. This distinction recalls the above discussion of how education must continually seek out “pathologies” to immunize white children against. This hunt is without end and quickly becomes an autoimmunitary response that continually divides schooling against itself to create such protections (Bourassa & Margonis, 2017; Lewis, 2009). Invocations of soul by textbook protestors operationalized a revanchist colonizing of a concept that throughout the twentieth century was aesthetically and politically linked to Blackness. In “claiming protective custody of their children’s souls as the essence of *their* godliness and of their ‘whiteness,’” protestors not only rendered Cleaver as soulless they also stole soul from Blackness (Mason, 2009, p. 159). Following Esposito (2008), such bio-spiritual incorporations are problematic because once the soul is introduced into biopolitical discourses, racism quickly adjudicates who—which bodies—possess a soul, which then determines who is proper to the body politic.

If the Kanawha County textbook controversy enclosed white students against an external multiracial curriculum to protect their curricular souls, anti-CRT legislation is more suggestive of a productive inclusion (Bourassa, 2018) that biopolitically steers sociality toward particular directions (i.e., the ostracism of Black life). A biopolitics of inclusion is more dangerous than repressive exclusions because it is obfuscatory (e.g., the the civil rights movement isn’t excluded, its included to valorize whiteness) and requires constant internal regulations of educational life. Take, for example, Florida’s 2021 change to the Required Instruction Planning and Reporting statute:

Examples of theories that distort historical events and are inconsistent with State Board approved standards include the denial or minimization of the Holocaust, and the teaching of Critical Race Theory, meaning the theory that racism is not merely the product of prejudice, but that racism is embedded in American society and its legal systems in order to uphold the supremacy of white persons. Instruction may not utilize material from the 1619 Project and may not define American history as something other than the creation of a new nation based largely on universal principles stated in the Declaration of Independence. Instruction must include the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights and subsequent amendments.

This statutory change is productive in its insistence that historical events should not be excluded, but rather included in ways that intentionally steer white students toward an ideal and demonstrably false version of American history. This ideal aligns the curricular souls of white children and the Racial Contract through a *Herrenvolk* hierarchicalization of knowledge that, on the one hand, roots Black intellectual thought (e.g., the 1619 Project) “in an ontological condition of less than human” and, on the other, “supports Whiteness as a fully human condition” (Pierce, 2017, p. 42) “based largely on universal principles.” The Kanawha County textbook controversy illustrates how protesting on behalf of the curricular souls of white children inflects this noncorporeal property with material educational life. Parental protests, both then and now, biopolitically link the curricular souls of “our children” to the soul of the nation via whiteness making white children the exclusive property of schooling and society who must be protected against community expropriations like a new multiracial language arts curriculum.

Affirmations: Black Sociality

Internal regulations of educational life are currently moving beyond anti-CRT legislation toward determining proper forms of emotionality and sociality. For example, in addition to the above statutory change, Florida is seeking to eliminate social and emotional learning (SEL). Opponents of SEL advance an ideal vision of education as an academic space where white emotionality and sociality are the norm because they are “based largely on universal principles.” While SEL is not without criticism (Kearl, 2022), its elimination further regulates away hope that schooling could be an antiracist homeplace that affirms Black sociality. Combined with anti-CRT legislation, such efforts perpetuate an immunitary logic of dark suffering. While Love (2019) is critical of how education and, in particular, white teachers imagine themselves as “somehow immune to perpetuating dark suffering” (p. 22), affirmations of Black sociality like Black Joy forever hopefully refuse this suffering. For Love, the pervasiveness of the former necessitates the latter: “Joy provides a type of nourishment that is needed to be dark and fully alive in White spaces, such as schools” (p. 120). Black Joy affirms not just Black life but educational life *in toto* against the deadening and discouraging conditions reproduced by anti-CRT legislation. As an expression of Black sociality, Black Joy insists that Black children are assets not deficits who should be supported in embracing their full humanity. Black Joy refracts Du Bois’ (1973/2001) biopolitical observation that “we have had as our goal—American full citizenship, nationally recognized. This has failed—flatly and decisively failed. Very well. We’re not dead yet. We are not going to die” (p. 132).

Love (2019) helps to map an educational biopolitics that reimages educational life in ways that might affirm the lives of students of color. Rethinking negations of educational life requires turning from immunity to community. If immunization is the negative protection of life, then community is the affirmation of life itself, which Esposito (2008) defines as an obligation of reciprocal donation that jeopardizes any individual ownership of community. It is here that Esposito’s etymological analysis of how immunity and community share the Latin root *munus* is helpful. Defined as a debt, a pledge, or a gift to be given, *munus* coheres immunity and community together. Immunity is an enclosure from the sacrifice of gift giving or an exemption from the reciprocal debt owed to community. For example, Matias (2016a) suggests that whites cling to a sadomasochistic love of whiteness, which immunizes them “from their human responsibility to shoulder their fair share” (p. 61). Immunity is an exemption from community obligations that takes the gift of community as one’s own. By contrast, community is an expropriation of oneself as proper and property which exposes the singular individual to a plurality in which life itself, not idealized universal principles, is the norm. It is a turning of oneself inside out toward obligations that are always owed but which can never be collected because they are collectively shared.

Du Bois (1973/200) helps to link Esposito’s (2008) etymological analysis of *munus* and Black sociality: “We already came bringing gifts. The song we sang was fresh from the lips that threw it round the world. We saw and heard voices that charmed an emperor and a queen. We believed in the supreme power of the ballot in the hands of the masses to transform the world” (p. 118). While Du Bois does not specify these gifts, they might be imagined, through the criticality of Moten (1988), as Blackness itself. For Moten, Blackness is an undercommon and fugitive social life that exists apart from any universal ideal of a polity embodied by scientific-legal reasoning that deems Black life “pathological.” Instead, Black sociality is a lived experience of *dehiscence*, an opening up or spilling out toward a life-in-common. This is perhaps a gift to which Du Bois alludes: the refusal to submit to deadening and discouraging conditions of educational confinement

and segregation. There is joy in this refusal. As a life-in-common, Black sociality refuses any polity structured by productive inclusions that claim community as one's own property. This is perhaps also a gift to which Du Bois alludes: an educational homeplace that affirms the shared humanity of Black life by contesting schooling's hierarchical obsession with white, propertied individualism.

The ontic presence of these gifts—Black Joy and homeplace—creates both autoimmune responses within whiteness and a forever hopeful, if not also regularly thwarted, reaching out toward a shared collectivity that recognizes Black sociality as an affirmation of educational life. Anti-CRT legislation embodies the former valence of this immunity/community relation. Still, education could be otherwise. An affirmative biopolitics is animated by the gifts of community already expressed in Blackness and which cannot be repaid except through expropriations of the white propertied self toward a life-in-common. Lloyd (2020) elaborates: “The sociality of the aesthetic refuses the moment of individuation through which the Kantian subject of taste arrives at its universality by way of the enclosure of a common sense that proscribes the feelings in which life-in-common is predicated as ‘pathological’” (p. 84). The Kantian subject invoked here shares an exclusionary identity with the Lockean subject written into the US Constitution and codified in anti-CRT legislation (Mills, 1997). Blackness exists in apposition to this exclusion, that is, it exists alongside codifications of white sovereignty while also refusing to become a property or proper identity. Rather, “blackness is the moving ground of solidarity” (Lloyd, 2020, p. 89). While it would be a mistake to posit Black sociality as a cure for immunitary whiteness, it is nonetheless a way of freedom dreaming (Love, 2019) against education's autoimmune enclosure toward an opening up or spilling out of alternative educational arrangements.

Conclusion

This article has argued that anti-CRT legislation biopolitically weaponizes white emotionality and curricularly codifies white ignorance. Immunitary whiteness conceptualizes how anti-CRT legislation negatively protects both schooling and society by enclosing each as proper to whiteness. Following Du Bois' (1973/200) reflections on education, what results from this enclosure is a *Herrenvolk* ordering of schooling and the governing of society via the Racial Contract. The Kanawha County textbook controversy of 1974 demonstrates how the curricular souls of white children biopolitically embody this enclosure. In positing Black sociality as a gift that can affirm educational life, this article has endeavored to do Black whiteness studies, that is, it has utilized Black intellectual thought to counter-narrate anti-CRT legislation and its racializing assemblages of Black thought and life as less-than-human. Black sociality is a critically important response to anti-CRT legislation because it refuses the reproduction of social ostracism and pathological ascriptions of Black life. Within this refusal is a forever hopeful reimagining of education as an antiracist homeplace imbued with Black Joy.

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Critical Race Theory & Abolition: Disrupting Racial Policy Whiplash in Teacher Education

Edwin Mayorga & Jennifer Bradley

Abstract

In 2021, like far too many states around the U.S., educators in Pennsylvania have been forced to wade through a myriad of attacks against educating students for liberation and justice under the guise of combating Critical Race Theory (CRT). There is a fair amount of “racial policy whiplash” in educators, as many states are simultaneously incorporating culturally sustaining and antiracist pedagogies into their teacher certification requirements. We explore this racial context as teacher educators organizing in a racially and ethnically diverse department at a small liberal arts college (SLAC). We begin by naming our theoretical North Star, guided by CRT, abolition, and Yamamoto’s (1997) Critical Race Praxis (CRP) approach. We then argue that a societal “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz, 1995) continues to dominate teacher education at all levels (including our own), and highlight ways our teacher education community experienced the psychological, material and curricular violence of racial policy whiplash. The second half of this paper details the self-study of our departmental effort to center antiracism and abolition in all aspects of community and concludes by advocating for a ‘doubling down’ on both abolition and critical race theory as ways to sustain our own work and the field of teacher education.

Keywords: *critical race theory, abolition, culturally sustaining pedagogy, antiracism, teacher education*

Introduction: ‘Keep Going’

Swarthmore College is a small liberal arts college (SLAC) that sits just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As faculty within the Department of Educational Studies there, national, state and local events of 2020 and 2021 caused what we experienced as social and psychological racial policy whiplash. We define racial policy whiplash as a shared and individual experience of psychological, social and emotional injury or confusion that results from the whipping back and forth of multiple and often contradictory messages of racialized mandates, policies, practices and social relationships. In education and teacher education, racial policy whiplash is felt and experienced at all levels: from broad competing policies and their implementation within institutions, to the most intimate of relationships between individual people. 2020 was punctuated by the murder of George Floyd and the uprisings that followed, the often hasty-spread of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) statements, the resurgence of anti-Asian violence, and protest and social media posts that identified ways in which our own institution and department were implicated in perpetuating structural racial violence. With COVID-19 beginning to infect billions and kill millions around the

globe, we, like so many committed to intersectional justice, were and continue to be, beyond exhausted.

Already fatigued, this tumultuous wave of whiplash was exacerbated in 2021, as state and local conservative movements and school boards across the country were fueled by the Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping signed by then-U.S. President Donald Trump (Executive Order, 2020). This order pushed forward state legislation bills that seek to prevent the teaching of concepts including LGBTQ+ themes and Critical Race Theory (CRT), including within our own state of Pennsylvania. Under the guise of combatting a CRT “indoctrination agenda,” (McMorris-Santoro et al., 2021), teachers in the Central York School District (PA) were ordered to remove the book *Hair Love* from their classrooms and to stop using resources from *Teaching Tolerance/Learning for Justice*. More restrictive legislation has followed in Pennsylvania and across the country, illustrating that these are not discrete legislative policies, but rather part of a broader whipping back and forth that contributes to creating and sustaining a reality where racism, white supremacy and antiBlackness are, as CRT-scholars assert, endemic in all aspects of social life (Crenshaw, 1994; Ladson-Billings et al., 1995; Stovall, 2005).

In this paper, we, the authors, couple CRT and abolitionist modes of study, asking two questions: First, how have we as a teacher education community experienced been impacted by racial policy whiplash? And, second, in the face of this racial tumult, how might the centering and expanding antiracist and abolitionist approaches by our Educational Studies department support our own and our students’ capacity, paraphrasing Harriet Tubman’s advice (Chan, 2008), to ‘keep going’?

We begin to explore these questions by clarifying our theoretical North Star, guided by both CRT and abolition, and a critical race praxis (CRP) framework (Stovall, 2005; Yamamoto, 1997). We make sense of the recent racial context by moving between national, state and local dimensions of policy conflict and social movements as seen through our experiences as individuals, colleagues, and teacher educators organizing in a racially and ethnically diverse department at a SLAC. We argue that a societal “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz, 1995) continues to overwhelm teacher education at all levels (including our own), and highlight ways our teacher education community experienced the psychological, material and curricular violence of racial policy whiplash. The latter part of the paper details the self-study of our departmental effort to center antiracism and abolition in all aspects of community, including our culture, syllabi, content selection, and classroom teaching practices. To conclude, we articulate our internal call to double down on both abolition and CRT as ways to sustain our own work and the work of the broader field in this period of racial policy whiplash. It is our hope that sharing our navigational story will provide others an opportunity to learn from our experiences and be steeled in their own efforts to ‘keep going.’

Positionality

The co-authors identify as parent-educator-scholar-activists; one tenured male associate professor of Color and one non-Hispanic white, disabled female (contingent) assistant professor who have each taught in the department together for 8 years. Recognizing that small liberal arts contexts are unique within the landscape of teacher education, we also note that we have both taught in a variety of teacher education programs, including community college, city and state-level public universities, and large private universities. In all of these settings, we have worked to

position ourselves as educators who think critically about race, serving as students of both curriculum and theory, and working to adopt and enact a critical race praxis.

Our Theoretical North Star: Abolition & CRT

Stovall (2005) notes that “CRT is not the “end-all-be-all” in creating antiracist education. Instead, it should be included in the array of epistemologies that address issues of race and racism in education” (p. 197). Grounded by our experiences in teaching, activism, research and teacher education, our inquiry into this current moment of racial policy whiplash centers and appreciates CRT, while also drawing on other epistemologies and modes of resistance that share a profound commitment to addressing race and racism in education. We are also guided, importantly, by abolitionist and abolitionist teaching traditions, understanding abolition as the antagonistic contradiction to enslavement and carcerality, not solely in the United States, but throughout the world. We look to Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2017) who said that,

...freedom is not simply the absence of enslavement as a legal and property form. Rather, the undoing of bondage--abolition--is quite literally to change places: to destroy the geography of slavery by mixing their labor with the external world to change the world and thereby themselves...(p. 231)

and to Bettina Love (2019) who centers abolition in the classroom...

Abolitionist teaching asks educators to acknowledge and accept America and its policies as anti-Black, racist, discriminatory, and unjust and to be in solidarity with dark folx and poor folx fighting for their humanity and fighting to move beyond surviving. To learn the sociopolitical landscape of their students’ communities through a historical, intersectional justice lens. (p. 11)

Abolitionist practices are, Gilmore (2017) notes, “a way of studying, and of doing political organizing, and of being in the world, and of worlding ourselves [that] requires challenging the normative presumption that territory and liberation are at once alienable and exclusive” (p. 258) Abolition thus functions as our social, psychological, political and spiritual North Star.

Yet abolition is not, as the Education for Liberation Network and Critical Resistance Editorial Collective (2021) make clear, CRT, but CRT is vital here. CRT grounds us in understanding the endemic existence of racism and white supremacy as specific global systems of oppression, centering race and racism in our analyses, and collectively pointing us toward taking action, rather than remaining in the abstract. Coupled together, CRT and abolition guide us in ways of thinking and practice that do not simply critique or modify intersecting forms of oppression, but animate our collective creation of another world. Contending that “freedom is a place,” Gilmore goes on to quote Harriet Tubman as saying, “to this solemn resolution I came; I was free, and they should be free also; I would make a home for them” (p. 236). Taking Gilmore and Tubman to heart, we believe that it is our duty as teacher educators to create freedom as a home for our students so that they may in turn create homes for their students and their families. CRT and abolitionist practices guide us to fulfill both our pedagogical and scholarly commitments.

Overwhelming Whiteness: The Racial Climate of Teacher Ed

While those might be our aspirations, we as educators have not yet arrived in this ‘place of freedom.’ Teacher education remains overwhelmingly entrenched in whiteness and white supremacy, and these conditions shape both the direction of the field and the experience for all involved. As research has shown, the composition of the teaching workforce remains overwhelmingly white; 79% of U.S. teachers identify as white (Schaeffer, 2021), and in our state of Pennsylvania recent numbers are even more lopsided with white teachers making up 94% of the teaching force (Shaw-Amoah et al., 2020). Not as well documented, but equally concerning, are racial demographics amongst teacher educators. Sleeter (2017) notes that back in 2007, teacher education faculty (including adjunct faculty) were 78% white. These numbers are indicative of how structural racism continues to sustain a white teaching force over time, as teachers of Color continue to be detoured from the profession, even as student populations become more and more racially diverse across urban, suburban and rural contexts (Cabral et al., 2022).

Sleeter (2001) suggests that there is an “overwhelming presence of whiteness” in teacher education, but this does not speak only to demographics. Kohli et al. (2021), who focus on the health and wellbeing of educators of Color, suggest that representation amongst teachers and teacher educators is part of a broader racial climate that includes five interrelated dimensions: Historical (ongoing legacies of racism); Organization and structural (commitment to racial justice); Compositional (critical mass of people of color); Behavioral (purposeful engagement); and, Psychological (well-being of teacher candidates of color). These five dimensions, based on CRT, are a reminder that white supremacy is a sociopolitical system (Mills, 2003) that shapes all aspects of the social order and thus the production of the racial climate at any given moment. In a “society structured on racial subordination, white privilege” (Harris, 1993, p. 1731) and white supremacy operate as the fulcrum upon which the society pivots, and teacher education is no exception.

In her *Whiteness as Property*, Harvard Law Review article that has become a foundational text of CRT, Cheryl Harris (1993) argues that whiteness, like property, holds a “right to exclude” as its core, and that exclusion is based on those people and ideas deemed to be “not white”: “What persists is the expectation of white-controlled institutions in the continued right to determine meaning - the reified privilege of power - that reconstitutes the property interest in whiteness in contemporary form” (p. 1762). Through course syllabi, state certification standards, course instructors, cooperating teachers and field supervisors, among other policy structures and relationships, teacher education is an institutional site filled with spaces where the overt, as well as subtle and covert, ideologies and technologies of whiteness continue to circulate, adapt and expand social control.

As such, teacher education remains centered in whiteness, and this creates racial climates that harm teaching candidates. “Even in teacher education programs that describe themselves as social justice-oriented,” Kohli et al. (2021) note, “teacher candidates of Color are excluded, segregated, and displaced” (p. 2). Moreover, in teacher education classes and in practitioner contexts, “color blindness and racial microaggressions manifest as macro and micro forms of racism and take a toll on the professional growth and retention of teachers of Color” (Kohli, 2018, p. 307). It is clear that whiteness shapes the experiential conditions of all educators with respect to their constructed relationships to whiteness.

Further, Matias & Zembylas (2014) charge that whiteness often masks true emotions, which in turn, has a toxic effect on antiracist efforts designed to combat the impact of white supremacy. “In an educational climate where antiracist projects are heralded... it is important for all educators to critically analyze and reflect on their (racialized) emotions, the ways in which these

emotions are constructed through whiteness, and how their displays may counteract antiracist endeavors” (p. 320). Matias & Zembylas warn that when educators repress emotions like shame and disgust while simultaneously claiming to ‘care for’ and ‘love’ their students, they are in fact upholding a status quo around whiteness. This serves as a danger to educators at all levels, but particularly for those of us guided by CRT: “the emotionality of whiteness is of grave concern for us as critical race educators” (p. 328). In short, teacher education is profoundly impacted by the multiple dimensions of whiteness, which produces and sustains a toxic racial climate across national, local, and personal levels. Sadly, this is the harmful context in which teacher educators and our students find ourselves as we go about our work each day.

Methodology: Critical Race Praxis and Self-Study

As we investigate the relationship between the theories and practices surrounding antiracist teacher education, we employ what legal scholar Yamamoto (1997) describes as Critical Race Praxis (CRP). Serving as our primary methodological framework, CRP is considered an outgrowth of CRT (Buenavista et al., 2021). Stovall (2005) contends that the purpose of CRT is “twofold: to identify White supremacy in education; and to develop praxis to counter its hegemony (Stovall, 2005, p. 197). In this way, CRT is both an analytic framework and an engagement of action. Drawing upon CRT, Yamamoto asserts that CRP, “focuses on developing and then translating critical theoretical insights about race, culture, and law into operational ideas and language for antiracism practice and, in turn, rethinking theory in light of new practice experience” (p. 877). As such, CRP is a relationship in motion between theory and action that centers on the analysis of race and racism as a means to subvert it and pursue something new. Yamamoto, also suggests four starting points for what he describes as *race praxis inquiry*: “the conceptual (being able to name the issue at hand), the performative (taking action to engage the issue), the material (identifying resources to address the issue), and the reflexive (reflecting on the process)” (p. 877). These starting points become guideposts in our departmental self-study.

Our Colleagues and Departmental Self Study

Guided by CRP, our self-study is also informed by S-STTEP research approaches (Vanassche & Berry, 2020), focusing “on conceptualizing what is actually happening in practice and *why* that might be happening, as opposed to normative definitions of what should happen in that practice (e.g., in terms of lists of required competences or standards)” (p. 188). Our departmental self-study included 13 participants: six BIPOC (two Black, three Asian, one Asian Latine) and four white non-Hispanic faculty members, one white Latina faculty member, and two white non-Hispanic staff members. Six members are tenured, and five were either visiting or junior faculty. Three identify as cis-het males, and ten identify as cis-het females. From fall 2020 through spring of 2022, our department participated in monthly equity-focused department meetings, two departmental retreats, and four qualitative focus group sessions. The co-authors were also interviewed 1:1 by our research assistant, and our teacher education students participated in two focus group sessions as well. Additional data sources included document reviews of our antiracist departmental work, the Pennsylvania Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Educational (CR-SE) competencies, and student-authored recommendations to the department (Henry and Riddick, 2020).

We used this departmental self-study on antiracism as our primary program assessment to comply with institutional expectations, but more importantly, we saw it as a way to deepen our practice and respond to the national, state, and local CRT attacks in our state and beyond. Yamamoto (1997) asserts that within legal scholarship, the conceptual aspect of CRP is where one “examines the racialization of a controversy and the interconnecting influences of heterosexism, patriarchy, and class, and locates that examination within a critique of the political economy. It thus focuses on both the particulars and the context of a relationship in conflict” (p. 878). By describing and analyzing recent policy events, we unpack how circumstances have created racial policy whiplash on local, state and national levels, and how we as teacher educators have experienced these circumstances. The second portion of our study focuses on what Yamomoto refers to as the performative (action) and reflexive aspects of our process.

Racial Policy Whiplash on Multiple Levels

The realness of racial policy whiplash for both our department and our students begins, not with national and state level battles, but with the intimate struggle for racial justice on our small campus. During the Black Lives Matter protests in the wake of murder of George Floyd, hundreds of Black@(school name) accounts were created on social media. Black students used these social media platforms to document and share the institutional harm they had been navigating over the years, which ran contrary to Swarthmore’s depiction of itself as an inclusive and justice-centered place. Our department, among many, and specifically our Power & Pedagogy: Intro to Education course, were identified on the #BlackAtSwat account as sources of harm at the college (See Fig 1).

Figure 1: *Black@Swat Posts*

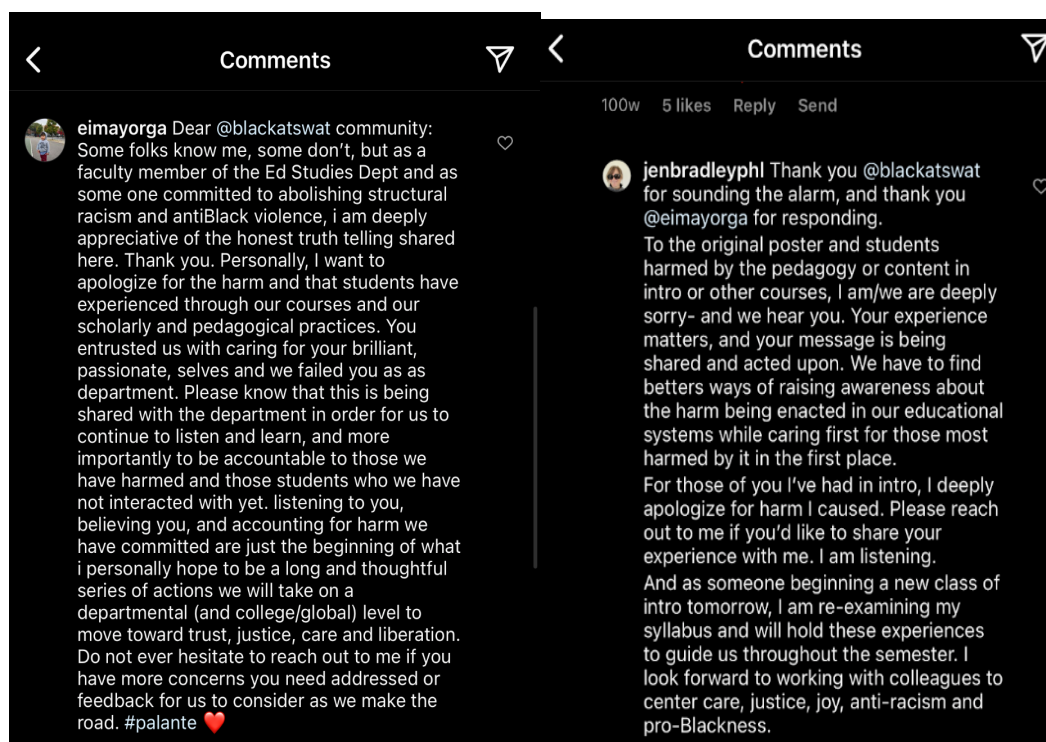


The whiplash or “mind f*ck” created from the contradictions of centering BIPOC experiences while sustaining the exploitation of “black suffering” (Dumas, 2014) produced deeply problematic learning conditions. In addition, two of our recent Black alums, Maya Henry & Alexis Riddick, met with one of the co-authors during the #ScholarStrike the fall of 2020, where they chronicled both personal and systemic issues they experienced moving through the department in the teacher certification program.

Their feedback, paired with the #BlackAtSwat social media posts sparked a departmental self-study and journey that is now a regular part of our departmental structure. As faculty members, our immediate reaction to the Instagram posts was deep sadness and feelings of guilt that we had caused our students harm. For some of our faculty members of color, it was a reminder of the “changing same” that we have felt in our relationships to higher education and teacher preparation, and that we too are continually implicated in the sustainability of institutional whiteness. Due in part to the omnipresence of whiteness that obscures our capacity to see it, we had missed the ways we were, as Matias & Zemblayas (2014) show, upholding a status quo around whiteness.

Yet guilt is not a useful emotion for long; it requires us to make amends, to hold ourselves accountable, and to do better. We, the co-authors, began by responding to the posts themselves (Fig 2), publicly acknowledging the pain and the harm and promising to address it as a department.

Figure 2: *Responses from Co-Authors*



As a result, our department began dedicating two monthly meetings to working through the questions raised, the suggestions put forth, our orientation towards equity and racial justice, and the ways in which we’d been complicit in sustaining oppression. The BlackAtSwat Instagram posts

and Henry & Riddick's (2020) detailed notes served as guideposts for those early discussions that lie at the heart of revised goals, syllabi, and mission statement from the department. We are deeply grateful to our students for sounding the alarm, and we have a renewed commitment that this work must be explicit, collective, prioritized, and ongoing.

Antiracism and anti-CRT Movements in Pennsylvania

As we embarked on introspection and action on the departmental level, anti-CRT movements gained greater traction across a number of states in the U.S., including in our home state of Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania is a densely populated, electoral “purple state,” with a wide range of K-12 districts and teacher preparation programs ranging from small to large and rural to suburban to urban districts, as well as private, public and ‘elite’ higher education institutions. In 2021, a state bill to ban CRT in K-12 classrooms was defeated in the fall, and a “curriculum transparency” (a back-door effort to incite curricular controversy over equity pedagogies) bill was vetoed by the governor at the end of the year. These public ‘attacks on CRT’ are as strategic as they are disingenuous, yet they continue to be waged well into 2022. The anti-CRT movement is a campaign to replace antiracist curriculum, materials, and methods across all educational levels with white supremacist and racist (in the guise of ‘race neutral’) ideologies. This scenario has created “racial policy whiplash” in educators as we are pulled towards anti-racist pedagogies in the wake of George Floyd’s death, while simultaneously being surveilled and (at times) punished for teaching anything that even touches upon antiracism.

Moreover, during these anti-CRT attacks our state legislature has amended teacher preparation requirements to include ‘Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education’ (CR-SE) competencies (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2021). The CR-SE competencies require that PA educators:

take an anti-racist stance, which includes acknowledging the systemic inequities that hinder equal access for all learners and stand in solidarity with and act on behalf of every learner. This demands a commitment to dismantling systemic racism, nurturing a love of learning, and ensuring equitable paths to success for each learner regardless of race, skin color, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, language, and other factors. (p. 2)

These CR-SE competencies speak directly to the centrality of race, intersectionality, and the impact of systemic racism throughout our education, and these concepts are all rooted in CRT. This means that many educators in Pennsylvania will be evaluated based on how well and to what extent they can demonstrate competency in the very concepts politicians are banning from their classrooms and parents are threatening to fire them over. The coupling of anti-CRT movements and efforts to support anti-racist teaching are thus indicative of how racial policy whiplash circulates on all levels. These conditions place educators in incredibly precarious, stressful, and often untenable positions.

Whiplash: our Department & the Field

Teaching at a small liberal arts college, we often fly under the radar of state level machinations. So it was not surprising that, for the most part, we found that our departmental colleagues

did not feel that their job security or their approach to teaching was under attack. Yet as colleagues who are connected to the broader field of teacher education, who see the struggles many of our former students are undergoing, we are still feeling the effects of racial policy whiplash. Participant 1, one of our contingent professors, spoke to this directly,

I think...it hasn't really impacted the way I teach or the things I want to bring up, but having colleagues who teach in other types of settings and other teacher education programs, and knowing colleagues who've had a lot of expense, a lot of contractual harassment, for example, or have, you know, had just had to have lots of really unpleasant interactions with administration over incorporating these ideas, even in courses that are supposed to be about multiculturalism, or multicultural education and so I think it is so stark to me anyway to think about how different it is at every institution. And in a lot of ways I do feel very lucky here anyway, that the work is uncontested here.

Our colleague's comments remind us that anti-CRT threats position our program and our antiracist approach into an antagonist relationship with the whiteness of teacher education, a juxtaposition with the field's general tendency toward compliance and rule-following. In short, this creates a feeling of criminalization within anti-racist teacher education work. So what does this mean for shaping our program and the experiences of our teacher candidates? In our focus group, Participant 3 highlights this tension in sending students out into field placements. She notes,

how do you help prepare them [teacher candidates] to go into the settings that are the supportive environments and still do the work that needs to be done?...[How do we] raise up these activist teachers and then ...on top of their first year of teaching, having so much pushback...just wondering about the burden on these new people that have no protections yet with tenure or anything?

Helping our teacher candidates navigate these contradictions while staying, we hope, grounded in antiracist principles, is one of the key ways that racial policy whiplash has taken its toll on our department. This criminalized position impacts the work of our program in a number of ways, but most importantly in how we support our teacher candidates and alumni in reconciling the conflicting messages they are receiving between our program, educational policy, and their classrooms.

Departmental Action

In the context of contemporary racial policy whiplash, our work as a small department is evolving as we 'keep going,' yet we want to highlight some of the action steps we have taken to see, think, protect from, and dismantle structures and practices that fuel white supremacy and racialized oppression in our field and society. First, apologizing and holding ourselves accountable for our role in perpetuating intersectional forms of harm is key. Drawing inspiration from restorative and transformative justice traditions that focus on "repairing past harms, stopping present harm, and preventing the reproduction of harm," (New England Board of Higher Education, 2022) we, the authors, responded to the #BlackAtSwat, with public apologies that signaled a beginning and not an end. This aligns with the intentions of both CRP and abolitionist emphases on healing.

The second step requires clarifying language and purpose. One example comes in the re-writing of our departmental goals. While these goals had been revised by our faculty just two years

before, using a more systemic and race-conscious lens, we could see how they remained race-evasive. Our existing program overview and learning goals (which our syllabi are aligned to support) were steeped in criticality and praxis, yet there was no mention of justice or race. As we met to examine them with a more race-conscious approach in the fall of 2021, we made our language, and therefore our work, more explicitly anti-racist:

The Department of Educational Studies is committed to anti-racism, social justice, and sustainability in the pursuit of liberation for all people. We believe children and youth deserve educational environments where they can experience joy as learners and thrive. Our mission exists in partnership with broader global struggles against anti-Blackness, anti-immigrant policy and practice, as well as structural racism and other intersecting systems of oppression. As a community of students, faculty, and staff, we aim to be reflective, innovative and collaborative in how we contribute to a more just and equitable world.
(Department of Educational Studies Website)

Learning Goal #2: Students will be able to use antiracist, liberatory, disability studies and critical race theory frameworks (among others) to think critically and generatively about key concepts in the field.¹

Changes in language are at once both small and large. Small, as they were long overdue and can be seen as incremental. And yet, this shift in language anchors structural change, as we collectively anchor the stance of the department, naming the unnamed, and centering justice and antiracism. We are seeking to get at the root of where the departmental work with students is grounded- offering a different baseline from which we will all orient our syllabi, fieldwork, and partnerships.

Another action step is dedicating time for collective antiracist work within department meetings, retreats, courses, and syllabi development. Through this collaboration, we have established anti-racist and abolitionist core texts that are now used throughout our courses. Love's (2019) *Abolitionist Teaching* is certainly a foundational text in our program, but we have also adopted Ghoddy Muhammad's (2020) *Cultivating Genius* across several courses. Rooted in Black intellectual traditions, Muhammad's framework of skill, intellectualism, identity, criticality and joy have helped both students and professors enact antiracist and abolitionist practices in the classroom and the field. These steps have shifted the foundation of our program: Muhammad's five elements serving as pillars for everything from classroom observations to lesson planning.

In addition, the College annually requires a departmental direct assessment of student learning, and we have used our antiracist and abolitionist journey as a springboard for assessing teacher candidates' understanding of race, racism, and antiracist teaching. As we write, we are in the process of implementing year three of this assessment, an example of how this work has reshaped instruction, content, and even how we interact. In doing so, we are developing an antiracist and student-centered way of understanding how our efforts impact student learning and growth. It is our hope that building antiracist structures and practices allows us to move beyond checklists and externally-mandated demands and move into more introspective work.

Beyond our department, we also see it as critical that we involve ourselves in broader policy debates and 'clap back' against the racial policy whiplash. With a solid grounding in both

1. Department Goals can be found here: <https://www.swarthmore.edu/sites/default/files/assets/documents/educational-studies/Department%20Goals%20-%20Oct%202021.pdf>

theory and practice in teacher education, reaching beyond our own institution and community becomes part of the resistance to policies seeking to uphold white supremacy and harm educators and students across our state and beyond. As such, we have engaged in collective actions that aim to shape policy in ways that nurture, support, and liberate marginalized students most impacted by disastrous policies. One of our department members helped to convene a group of Pennsylvania Education Scholars to leverage scholarship in ways that impact policy. Last year, the group created talking points for educators to respond to the critical race theory debate in the state and diversify the teacher workforce. Another colleague organized a national convening, bringing together educators from around the country to share and brainstorm supportive and effective sanctuary policies for undocumented students. These policies are directly related to our antiracist work, yet reach far beyond our own institution.

Conclusion: Doubling Down

In the face of critical race theory bans and the resulting racial policy whiplash, we have learned to more fully name and embrace critical race praxis. Although the tensions created by the whiplash reverberate through every level of the educational landscape, so too does the resistance. Yamamoto teaches us that healing and being able to move fluidly between theory and practice are essential skills, and ‘doubling down,’ rather than shying away from CRT and abolition, reminds us to both think *and* act. As we head into year three of our self-study, several lessons emerge. Adopting critical race praxis, and grounding our antiracist work in CRT while aiming for abolition, allows us to think more deeply about our practice. Our work, at its core, is always about our students. And yet, our responsibilities as transformative educators demand that we organize beyond our own classrooms and engage in the larger policy issues that impact us all.

Within our educational system, CRT reminds us that whiteness is property and, as our students taught us, our curriculum serves as both a tool and extension of white supremacy (Harris, 1993). CRT reminds us to interrogate whether we are centering race and anti-Blackness in our analysis and thinking systemically rather than individually. Abolition serves as a guide for where we aim to go, aspirationally. Bettina Love’s (2019) call to freedom-dream, centering Black joy and healing, and living into our role as accomplices, are all becoming part of our embodied praxis. While abolition is always a process of understanding and dismantling that which contains/imprisons/incarcerates, Yamamoto (1997) reminds us that it is also a process of healing and creation, thinking anew about different ways of being and living with each other through solidarity and mutuality.

Because we are trying to ‘build the plane while flying it,’ we are deeply appreciative of the time and labor that this journey has taken. It has become clear that education is again caught up in a volatile moment, shaped by whiteness and structural racism that in the context of COVID-19 has made these toxic times untenable. Given this maelstrom, we see this as a moment to lead rather than follow or make ourselves scarce. This is a moment to ‘double down,’ grounding our work in CRT/CRP and setting abolition as our North Star in teacher education. This means enacting healing and abolitionist practices across all aspects of our work, including our curriculum and instruction, our support of our teacher candidates and community partners, and policy advocacy. This is at once both urgent and slow work, and we believe it is central to building the more nurturing, sustainable, and just future that all students deserve.

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Misunderstanding the Campaign Against CRT: Absurdity and White Supremacy in Attacks on Teaching and Teacher Education

Richard Miller, Katrina Liu, & Arnetha F. Ball

Abstract

Recent efforts to ban the teaching of Critical Race Theory in U.S. public schools have been criticized for fundamentally misunderstanding both CRT and K-12 teaching and teacher education. This paper argues that Anti-CRT fear-mongering in the U.S. is a new face on an old practice, the racist use of public education to sustain White supremacy. Using the method of critical discourse analysis, it examines the current anti-CRT fulmination in terms of its continuity with the history of US White supremacy in education, looking in particular at the ideological strategies employed to silence oppositional voices. It first identifies the players—both people and money—behind the public face of the CRT ban movement, linking them to the initial reaction to Brown v. Board of Education in 1955. It then dissects the visible tactics and hidden strategies in anti-CRT efforts to describe a three-step process of disaster capitalism in education. It ends with thoughts on how unmasking of this sort can provide the basis for community action in defense of social justice and equity in education.

Keywords: *Critical Race Theory, White supremacy, critical discourse analysis, disaster capitalism, teacher education*

The importance of racial thought is misunderstood if only its absurdity and bad taste are seen and the continuation within it of an older and "respectable" trend is ignored... German anti-Semitism is a part of German intellectual history, it does not stand outside it.
(Mosse, 1958, pp. 265-266)

Introduction

Built upon Critical Legal Studies that analyzes systemic racism and its impact on American laws and institutions (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1996; Crenshaw, 1988; Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Delgado 1989, 1990, Matsuda, 1991, 1993, 1995), Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education offers a framework for understanding institutional racism and educational inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). One of the goals of CRT in teacher education is the preparation of K-12 teachers able to recognize the “illusion of freedom” provided by the Whiteness of U.S. society (Matias & Newlove, 2017) and provide tools for schools and teachers to develop curricula and pedagogy that better reflect the diversity of American experiences. Recent efforts to ban the teaching of Critical Race Theory in U.S. public schools have been criticized for fundamentally misunderstanding both CRT and K-12

teaching and teacher education (Pollock et al., 2022). The absurdity of the bans, as well as the circus atmosphere surrounding their promulgation, encourages ridicule—but it also obscures the continuous thread of racism and White supremacy that links today’s farce with yesterday’s tragedies. George Mosse (1958) pointed out in his discussion of the rise of fascist anti-Semitism in German literature that what distinguished Nazi anti-Semitism from its German predecessors was its “absurdity and bad taste” (p. 265), but he warned against focusing on that absurdity. Nazi anti-Semitism was at bottom, in Mosse’s assessment, neither foreign to German culture nor an aberration in German intellectual history—more outrageous, indeed, but ideologically identical.

Anti-CRT fear-mongering in the U.S. is similarly a new face on an old practice, the racist use of public education to sustain White supremacy. As Mosse observed with respect to German anti-Semitism, the absurdity of right-wing “misunderstanding” of CRT should not disguise the reality that the CRT opponents have manufactured a “disaster” in public education—using CRT as a convenient target to further reinforce control of the educational discourse and practice by instilling White hegemonic ideologies and eliminating the voices from diverse communities. The absurdity of CRT bans *is* the point: the resulting confusion and uncertainty develops an overarching climate of disaster that enables reinscribing White supremacy in public education. This paper uses Critical Discourse Analysis (Gee, 1999; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; van Dijk, 2018; Wodak, 2021) as a general method infused with the insights from Critical Race Hermeneutics (Allen, 2021) to examine the current anti-CRT fulmination in terms of its continuity with the history of US White supremacy in education, looking in particular at the ideological strategies employed to silence oppositional voices. We first identify the players—both people and money—behind the public face of the CRT ban movement, linking them to the initial reaction to *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1955. We then dissect the visible tactics and hidden strategies in anti-CRT efforts, employing both *small discourse* and *big discourse* texts (Gee, 1999) to describe a three-step process of disaster capitalism in education (Miller & Liu, 2021): manufacturing a disaster, rendering teachers, students, and families disposable, and selling private solutions to profit from the public purse. We end with thoughts on how unmasking of this sort can provide the basis for transformative community action in defense of social justice and equity in education.

Methodology: Critical Discourse Analysis

The purpose of this study is to unveil the players behind the anti-CRT hysteria and the tactics and strategies they employ in their efforts to further inscribe White supremacy in public education. In doing so, we searched for federal policies and state education agencies and collected documents that were publicly available. We also searched for monetary support to the anti-CRT campaign and any information pertaining to the strategies these players have implemented to achieve their goals. We then used Critical Discourse Analysis (Gee, 1999; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2021) to read and analyze these documents. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to study discourse as a social practice in which power hierarchies and inequities are established, justified, and maintained (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). It highlights that language is a power resource (Willig, 2014) and that language use “moderates and produces social and psychological phenomena” in a purposeful way (Mullet, 2018, p. 116). van Dijk (1993) pointed out that institutions, as “speakers,” hold power and discursive resources and as such there exists power imbalances between the speakers and the listeners. Political discourses about marginalized groups, enabled and reinforced through media discourses, reproduce discrimination and oppression that further maintain a hegemonic and oppressive system

(van Dijk, 2007). CDA unveils the linguistic manifestations of power (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) and as such, it enables the researchers to gain critical understanding of and further reveal hegemonic ideologies, power asymmetries, and systemic inequities involved in discourse (van Dijk, 1993). At the same time, unlike CRT, CDA does not put race at the center of the analysis. For this reason, we turned to Critical Race Hermeneutics (Allen, 2021) to go beyond power in general to focus on the racial basis of the processes by which different players manipulate a false impression among the public regarding the manufactured disaster of CRT in K-12 education in order to perpetuate White supremacy in education and society. The result is an unveiling of racial capitalism (Robinson, 2021) at work in both the long-term (disaster capitalism in education) and the short-term (moral panics over CRT) alike, regardless of the corporate nature of the former and the absurdist nature of the latter.

Theoretical Framework: Disaster Capitalism in Education

Disaster capitalism—the use of *disasters* to channel public funding into private pockets (Klein, 2005, 2014; Schuller & Maldonado, 2016)—is not a new practice in education. Indeed, although Klein coined the term with reference to the impact of Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans in 2005, the practice itself can be seen going back into the 1960s “White flight” from public schools undergoing desegregation into private and charter systems (Wilson, 2019, pp. 236-238). Over the succeeding half century, the commercial component of White flight has intensified, supporting “a long-running attack on public schools” (Miller & Liu, 2021, p. 2) featuring the funneling of public education funds into private organizations ranging from charter operators (Stride, Inc. being the largest such operator, reporting 2020 revenue in excess of \$1 billion) to testing organizations (NWEA, which runs the K-12 MAP testing, reports nearly \$200 million in annual revenue), and educational technology companies (Zoom, which holds the majority of the market for synchronous meeting software, reported revenue of \$2.6 billion in 2020 alone in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic). However, this capture of public education funding by private organizations has not simply been a slow and steady process; rather, there have been relatively short periods of rapid growth following which the new balance of public and private becomes the norm, never to return to the previous state. These periods of rapid growth are stimulated by crises, and thus represent disaster capitalism at work.

Disaster capitalism in education has historically worked through a cycle of three major strategies: 1) promoting the neglect of public resources, 2) rendering students, teachers, and families disposable, and 3) selling private solutions as substitutes for public resources (Miller & Liu, 2021). The initial step of the cycle, promoting the neglect of public resources, is typically predicated on an assertion of a state of “disaster;” sometimes the proximate disaster (although not necessarily the root disaster) is natural, as in Hurricane Katrina (2005), but in many cases the disaster is manufactured, as in the forecasts of “COVID learning loss” made in early 2020, even before the majority of public schools transitioned to remote teaching (Miller & Liu, 2021). Because the goal of disaster capitalism in education is to make private profit off the public purse, the second step—rendering students, teachers, and families disposable—is vital, as these three groups pose the only real obstacle because of the role of popular governance through school boards and parent-teacher organizations. With the preparation of the first two stages in place, disaster capitalism then proffers private solutions to the problems it has identified or invented, and with students, teachers, and families removed from the decision-making process, relies on the government-based leg of the

education industrial complex (Picciano & Spring, 2013) to funnel public funding into private pockets. In the succeeding sections we employ the theoretical framework of disaster capitalism in education to analyze the players, tactics, and strategies found in the anti-CRT movement in order to demonstrate the common base in racial capitalism.

Anti-CRT Players

The current anti-CRT national movement can be traced back to then-President Donald Trump's 2020 memo in which the White House Office of Management and Budget ordered a stop to funding federal training on diversity and Critical Race Theory. Around the same time, Trump sought to rebuke¹ the 1619 Project (Hannah-Jones et. al., 2021), which culminated with the release of his administration's "1776 Report" just prior to his leaving office.² Trump's Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping, which forbade "divisive concepts," including "race or sex stereotyping" and "race or sex scapegoating" as newly-defined in the EO (Exec. Order No. 13950, 2020). By April 28 2022, 42 states introduced bills or took other steps to "restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism" (Schwartz, 2022).

Notwithstanding the politicians' roles in developing CRT bans, there is a wide range of players involved. Action at all levels has been coordinated by organizations dedicated to profiting from the privatizing public education and choreographed through the mass media via opinion leaders, media personalities, think tank fellows, and a network of activists in every state. At the local level, anti-CRT voices are typically presented as outraged parents—as is implied by organizational names such as Families for Educational Freedom and Moms for Liberty—unconnected to larger organizations, but these "astroturf" organizations are deeply engaged with right-wing think tanks, media outlets, and other organizations (Gross, 2021). There is a complex network of organizations and individuals funding, organizing, and acting as media figures for the anti-CRT movement; Figure 1 (below) outlines some of the key players.

1. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/1619-project-took-over-2020-inside-story/2020/10/13/af537092-00df-11eb-897d-3a6201d6643f_story.html

2. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/how-trump-administration-s-1776-report-warps-history-racism-slavery-n1254926>

Figure 1: Major Players in the Anti-CRT Movement



In Figure 1 the main players in the anti-CRT efforts are organized into six distinct groups: 1) funding organizations, 2) Thought leaders and media personalities, 3) Conservative White evangelical Christian organizations, 4) Corporations, 5) Politicians and government officials, and 6) Think tanks. However, numerous individuals active in the Anti-CRT moral panic and disaster capitalism play multiple roles, moving from private to public sector and back. For example, using information from Ballotpedia.org and ProPublica's Nonprofit explorer, we coded Betsy DeVos as a "thought leader" not just because of her important role in promoting school vouchers in her home state of Michigan, and her position as Secretary of Education under Trump, but also because she is co-director of the DeVos Family Foundation, which supports charter and parochial schools across the country (Ballotpedia, 2023). Her natal family foundation, the Prince Family Foundation (directed by DeVos's brother, Erik Prince), also funds the conservative evangelical Christian Hillsdale University and the lobbying organizations Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council (Focus on the Family, 2019). Similarly, before Glenn Youngkin became Governor of Virginia, running on the anti-CRT moral panic, he spent nearly three decades working for Accelerate Learning, including serving as CEO from the acquisition of that company by the Carlyle Group in 2018 until his campaign began in 2020 (Dickinson, 2018).

Anti-CRT Tactics

The visible tactics anti-CRT players focus on controlling the narrative in order to increase the strength and reach of their political influence, keep their opponents busy responding to attacks, support the efforts of other players, and reinvigorate their true believers. The primary tactics are 1) “flooding the zone” with disinformation to drown out opposition voices, and 2) gaslighting both opponents and followers to confuse the former and invigorate the latter.

Tactic 1: Flooding the Zone with Disinformation

The first tactic anti-CRT players have used is, in the words of Steven Bannon, to “flood the zone” with disinformation (Iling, 2020). Bannon coined the phrase to describe how he, as editor of far-right media outlet Breitbart News and then as advisor to the Trump campaign, dealt with facts, opinions, and events that threatened to derail their control of the narrative: pump out as many statements, no matter how short or how absurd, to as many media outlets as possible, “flooding the zone” with disinformation. To some extent this tactic reflects the saying often attributed to P.T. Barnum that “there is no such thing as bad publicity,” but it also reflects a deliberate effort to foment outrage (described by far-right provocateurs as “trolling the libs”). Starr (2020) describes three developments encouraging the flood: 1) attrition of journalistic standards, 2) degradation of broadcast/viral media standards, 3) digital ecology that prioritizes growth and profit. All three have been intensified by the weakening or elimination of regulatory apparatus, both in terms of media (e.g., FCC) and business practices. With the “flooding the zone” strategy, anti-CRT supporters have been using CRT as a “catchall” term to cover anything from race, racism, White privilege, gender, sexism, cultural difference, police killing, LGBTQ, non-White people or non-White history, to anything that addresses racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. They convey misconceptions that equalize CRT to racism and spread the fear among the public that teaching CRT is divisive, teaching students to hate each other and demolishing American values. Princeton historian (and Senior Fellow at the Claremont Institute) Allen Guelzo, interviewed for a Washington Post editorial by Marc Thiessen forebodingly titled “The Danger of Critical Race Theory,” connected CRT to the evils of Stalin and Marx, warning that CRT would provoke a backlash such as “genuine White supremacy...at which point the only solution becomes violence” (Thiessen, 2021).

In addition to flooding the zone through the media, anti-CRT players have flooded the governing and administrative processes of public education by disrupting school board meetings, harassing school board members and school staff, filing lawsuits and federal complaints alleging discrimination against White students, and harassing parents who support teaching about equity issues. Although, as mentioned above, the individuals engaging in these tactics represent themselves as local parents, their actions are informed by national players. As former Trump advisor Steve Bannon said on a podcast in April 2021, “The path to save the nation is very simple. It's going to go through the school boards” (Bannon, 2021C). Christopher Rufo’s Manhattan Institute provides a “Critical Race Theory Briefing Book” that is meant to support this goal, providing guidance to creating a “grassroots network.” Under the heading of “Winning the Language War,” Rufo supplies talking points for use in attacking public education, such as “I oppose racism, whether it comes from the Klan or from critical race theory,” and encourages demonizing teachers as “political predators” (Rufo, 2022), thus perpetuating an “epistemological racial ignorance” vital to promoting White nationalism (Matias & Newlove, 2017).

Although absurd, these visible tactics effectively manufactured a narrative of disaster, tapping into the existing “emotionality of Whiteness” at the “root of resistance toward CRT” (Matias et al., 2016, p.1) to spread fear, threat, and uncertainty among parents and the public. At the same time, it effectively spread unprecedented animosity toward teachers, school administrators, and school boards. Rufo’s Guidebook is conveniently available as a downloadable PDF, attractively typeset and illustrated with images of non-White children; accompanying it are several other documents produced by Rufo’s Manhattan Institute, including model legislation for “regulating” CRT in the schools, as well as similar model legislation for “curriculum transparency.” The rapid growth and uniformity of the anti-CRT movement across the U.S. is due in no small part to Rufo’s efforts, and the results have been striking in both extent and ferocity. For example, due to threats of violence, school board meetings were moved from in-person to virtual in Nevada and Arizona and other places. Extra security guards and metal detectors were added in school board meetings; one school district in Missouri hired security to patrol two administrators’ homes due to frequent severe threats against them (Kinkade, 2021). The lack of trust in teachers and schools not only spawned “curriculum transparency” laws based on Rufo’s model legislation, but reached the point where the Nevada Family Alliance proposed putting body cameras on K-12 teachers to ensure that they weren’t teaching CRT (Villarreal, 2021). In another example in the South Kingstown School district in Rhode Island, one woman filed more than 200 open records requests demanding details on the teaching of CRT in the public schools, bringing chaos to the local school district administration (Dorion, 2021). The moral panic Rufo and others launched has also targeted school board members for recall and replacement by anti-CRT stalwarts. Between 2006 and 2020, *Ballotpedia* documented an average of 23 recalls against an average of 52 school board members. However, it tracked 92 school board recall efforts against 237 board members in 2021, more than triple the previous two decades. This effort, far from representing spontaneous local concerns, has been coordinated by the conservative Evangelical Christian organization the Council for National Policy, which includes on its board many of the figures described above as players in the anti-CRT movement—as well as Karen England, the Director of the Nevada Family Alliance (Nelson, 2021). Fomenting a moral panic has thus been a highly successful tactic.

Tactic 2: Gaslighting

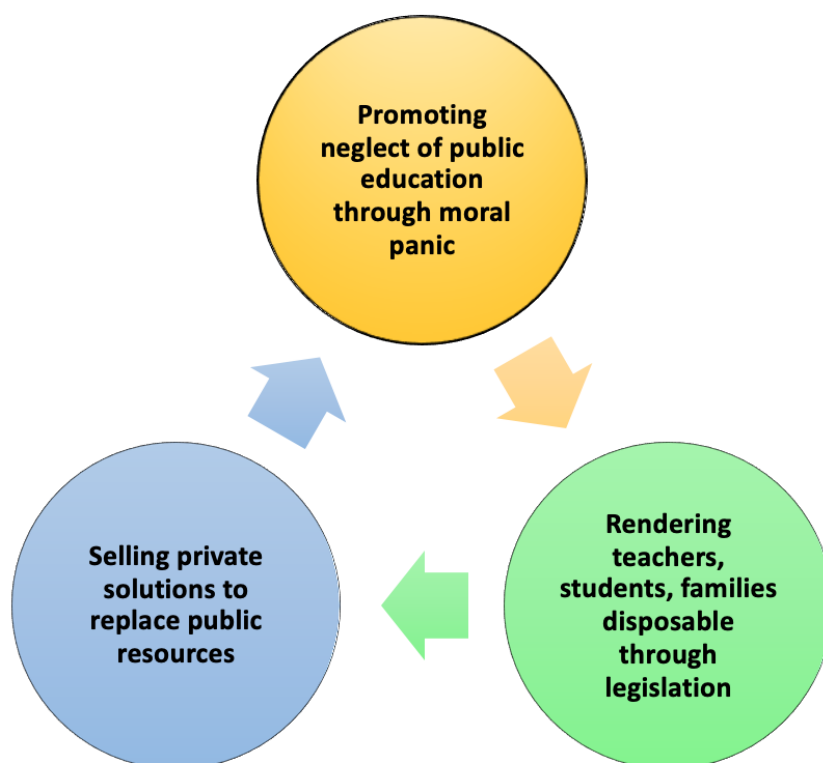
The second tactic of anti-CRT players is *gaslighting*, a form of emotional and psychological manipulation by bullies and other abusers that is intended to cause the targeted person to question their own knowledge and experience. The goal in classic psychological gaslighting is to confuse the targeted person, attacking their ability to trust their own perceptions and understanding, and render them dependent upon the gaslighter for a sense of stability and safety (Emamzadeh, 2022). In the context of political movements, gaslighting often takes the form of publicly and privately insisting that what is happening in an objectively verifiable way isn’t actually happening at all, or vice-versa—that something clearly not happening is, in fact, going on. In the context of racism, gaslighting works to deny the racial realities of people of color, even leading people of color to question their own experiences (Matias, et al., 2019, p. 219). This kind of gaslighting is at the heart of anti-CRT efforts. For example, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis stated in announcing the anti-CRT legislative proposal, Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees (DeSantis, 2021) that “In Florida we are taking a stand against the state-sanctioned racism that is critical race theory.... We won’t allow Florida tax dollars to be spent teaching [CRT to] kids to hate our country or to

hate each other” and the Florida Commissioner of Education Richard Corcoran stated “our classrooms, students and even teachers are under constant threat by Critical Race Theory advocates who are attempting to manipulate classroom content into a means to impose one’s values on students.”

Insisting that CRT is being taught in K-12 classrooms when there is no evidence that is the case is often combined with a more subtle form of gaslighting, in which the speaker links the target with negative images in a vague way that can neither be confirmed nor denied. This type of gaslighting is visible in the previous quote from Florida Governor DeSantis in his characterization of CRT as “state-sanctioned racism,” and the goal of CRT advocates to impose their values on others. Anti-CRT thought leader Christopher Rufo counsels this tactic in his Critical Race Theory Briefing Book and has made it clear that there is no sincerity behind the attack on CRT. As Rufo tweeted March 15, 2021, “The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think ‘critical race theory’” (Rufo, 2021). The vagueness of the accusations is deliberate, as it enables proponents to label anything they dislike as CRT; the use of gaslighting is an integral part, as it confuses opponents, who get caught up in refuting obvious untruths, but also further cements the true believers, who, not knowing what to believe, believe everything that comes from a source they trust (Hoffer, 1951). Moreover, it serves to refresh believers’ outrage to maintain the intensity of the disaster and their panic, escalating outrage with periodic announcements of new targets from CRT to LGBTQ+ to, most recently, the entire idea of public education at any level.

The actions described above, while themselves disruptive and dangerous, are merely the visible tactics of the anti-CRT players. As such, anti-CRT tactics bear striking resemblance to tactics in other social actions linked to the far right, such as protests against masking and vaccination for schoolchildren. The reason for the congruence of these tactics across a range of topics related to public education is that there are deeper strategies at work, and broader goals than simple control of the public-school curriculum. All of these efforts represent tactics in the strategies of disaster capitalism in education, the goals of which include the reinscription of White supremacy in the schools, and the conversion of public education into an engine for private profit. In the next section we detail the three stages of disaster capitalism in education articulated in (Miller & Liu, 2021) as they have been mobilized through the anti-CRT moral panic. Applying this model to the anti-CRT movement is instructive not only in revealing the absurdity of the discourse but the fundamental continuity of that discourse, absurdity and all, with previous efforts to turn public education into a cash cow for the private sector. An important element in the disaster capitalism use of anti-CRT to further privatize public education is the mobilization of a *moral panic* to instigate the first stage; rather than take advantage of a natural disaster, in this case disaster capitalism conjures one of its own. Figure 2 (below) demonstrates the three-stage process of disaster capitalism in the anti-CRT movement.

Figure 2: *The Process of Disaster Capitalism in Anti-CRT Movement*



Stage 1: Promoting Neglect of Public Education through Moral Panics

In understanding the anti-CRT movement as an element in a longer-running practice of disaster capitalism in education, it is important to recognize that the neglect of public education is first promoted by instigating a *moral panic* that can constitute a “disaster” that then demands action. Although the moral panic as an object of sociological study is not new (Cohen, 1972), its role in the history of public education is largely unremarked, so we briefly summarize below. Victor (1990), writing with respect to the Satanic ritual abuse panic among private evangelical schools in the 1980s, defined a “rumor-panic” as “a group’s fearful reaction to collectively shared stories about immediately threatening circumstances, in an ambiguous social situation” (Victor, 1990, p. 58). Victor’s rumor-panics are a subset of what Cohen (1972) first described as “moral panics,” and more thoroughly analyzed as social movements that begin by reacting to reported behaviors with anxiety (rumor-panic), moves to demonize the people associated with that behavior, exaggerating their conduct, and then linking that “evil,” exaggerated conduct with other similarly exaggerated conduct by claiming them all to be symptoms of a moral malaise (Garland, 2008, pp. 10-11).

Looking at the sudden rise of the anti-CRT movement we can see all the hallmarks of a moral panic. Conservative pundit Josh Hammer, referencing pieces by Christopher Rufo, announced that CRT in the schools “instilling racially divisive poison in the minds of impressionable students is a recipe for disaster.... Banning CRT...is a prudent and necessary first step to salvaging a fractious nation teetering on the brink of collapse” (Hammer, 2021). Similarly, Florida Governor

Ron DeSantis, in Rufo's words, "framed the rise of critical race theory as a moral threat to the United States," quoting DeSantis characterizing CRT as "an attempt to really delegitimize our history...to replace it with a very militant form of leftism that would absolutely destroy our country (Rufo, 2021).

The CRT moral panic is not simply an absurd attack on public education, however; it is the continuation of a long-standing effort to force neglect on the schools that previously focused on defunding education, deprofessionalizing teachers, and manufacturing a narrative of failure in public schools (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Zeichner & Peña-Sandoval, 2015). This neglect was exacerbated during natural or manufactured disasters, which functioned as an excuse for further neglect, as in New Orleans before and after Hurricane Katrina (Buras, 2007) and more recently as a result of the rush to remote teaching in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Miller & Liu, 2021). In the case of CRT "disaster," neglect has been instigated through direct impoverishment of the curriculum such as removing books from classrooms and libraries, and forbidding a wide range of topics and viewpoints from discussion. Neglect has also been further threatened at both state and federal levels by Republican politicians, such as the Stop CRT Act introduced by Senator Tom Cotton (Arkansas) and a parallel act in the House of Representatives by Dan Bishop (North Carolina) that would eliminate funding for institutions at all levels of public education that "promote critical race theory" or, in the case of higher education, "compel faculty members, students, or any other individual to affirm the tenets of critical race theory" (Cotton, 2021). A similar law was passed by the Tennessee legislature in May 2021, that directed the state Superintendent of Education to withhold funding from schools that failed to comply (Allison, 2021). Accompanying these legislative efforts have been calls to "return to the basics" in public education—reading, writing, and arithmetic—that promise to further impoverish the curriculum.

Stage Two: Rendering Teachers, Students, and Families Disposable through Legislation

Once the moral panic was well underway, the next step was to remove teachers, students, and families from the equation. In the case of CRT, this happened at multiple levels, from decisions made in individual schools and districts to state, and national legislation and rule-making that forced changes to the curriculum—such as banning topics from classroom discussion, and books from the library—and move to fire if not prosecute teachers and administrators accused of "indoctrinating students." A key maneuver here was to demand surveillance and conformity in place of critical voices: states and districts passed regulations requiring all curricular materials—including daily lesson plans—be posted on the Internet, and authorized anyone to object to them. Republican legislators in Oklahoma went farther, introducing a bill (SB 1470) in early February, 2022 that would establish fines and the potential to be fired for any "person that promotes positions in the classroom or at any function of the public school that is in opposition to closely held religious beliefs of students". The fines would be levied against "any and all" persons named by the complainant, and would be assessed at \$10,000 per person per incident; if any evidence surfaces of the defendants receiving "assistance" in defending themselves or paying they fines, they would be fired. Note that, although the bill mentions "parents" as the people to launch the proceedings, no definition was provided in the legislation for either "parent" or "closely held religious belief," nor was a mechanism suggested to prevent (or punish) frivolous claims.

Stage Three: Selling Private Solutions to Replace Public Resources

Once the schools and families were dispensed with, the ground was prepared for the third stage, selling private solutions. This stage of CRT disaster capitalism in public education is still in its infancy, but the basic elements are already clear. First, attempts have been made to use the evil of CRT in public education as “evidence” supporting the idea of dismantling the “public” part of public education through school vouchers. Although first proposed by Milton Friedman in 1955 as a direct response to the previous year’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, school vouchers today are most closely associated with the DeVos Family Foundation’s push to place evangelical Christianity at the center of US education (Rizga, 2017). Betsy DeVos, co-director of the DeVos Family Foundation, repeatedly attempted to implement school vouchers during her stint as Secretary of Education under President Trump, but was ultimately unsuccessful. It is notable, however, that her family foundation was successful in implementing school vouchers in her home state of Michigan in the late 1990s; the primary result was to stimulate White Flight into predominantly White school districts and private schools, while Black students moved into minority-majority charter schools, leaving the public schools to the relatively recent (and significantly poorer) Latino population (Rizga, 2017; Wilkinson, 2016).

School vouchers are only part of the story, however; while they do put enormous pressure on public school budgets, there are many other ways to extract private profit from public education, such as selling educational technology, required curricular materials, testing and test-training services, professional development services, and management. This aspect appeared with a shift from generalized denunciation of CRT in K-12 education to specific laws forbidding the teaching of CRT, which laid the groundwork for vetting textbooks and other materials for CRT. Initial efforts focused on lists of books to be removed from the curriculum and the libraries, primarily works of fiction, history, or social studies. On Friday, April 15, 2022, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) released a list of K-12 math textbooks that had been prohibited for use in the state. The press release, titled “Florida Rejects Publishers’ Attempts to Indoctrinate Students,” gave no specific titles, or examples of forbidden materials, but asserted that 41% of the textbooks had been rejected because they “included references to Critical Race Theory (CRT), inclusions of Common Core and the unsolicited addition of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in mathematics” (Florida Department of Education, 2022a). The following week, after receiving many requests for examples, the FDOE provided four images (without identifying the offending texts) in a press release that trumpeted “Publishers are aligning their instructional materials to state standards and removing woke content allowing the department to add 17 more books to the state adoption list over the past 14 days” (FDOE, 2022b). The examples were two statistical exercises using data on reported racial prejudice, and two lessons that included SEL objectives.

As FDOE released updated lists of approved math textbooks, it became clear that although there was a large number of titles, there were very few publishers, Table 1 summarizes the publishers supplying all the approved K-12 math textbooks as of April 29, 2022.

Table 1: *Publishers Accepted by the Florida Department of Education for Math Textbooks*

| Publisher | Parent Company | Number of Titles | Notes |
|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Accelerate Learning | Carlyle Group (as of 2018) | 9 | Glenn Youngkin, now Governor of |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|---|----|---|
| | | | Virginia, is a former CEO of Accelerate Learning until he ran for Governor in 2020 on an anti-CRT platform |
| Big Ideas Learning | Privately held | 13 | Has joint math projects with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (since 2013) and National Geographic Learning / Cengage (since 2017) |
| Savvas Learning Company | Nexus Capital Management | 20 | Spun off from Pearson to Nexus in 2019 |
| McGraw Hill | Apollo Global Management | 7 | Apollo also owns University of Phoenix, Yahoo!, ADT Security, and several healthcare groups |
| Carnegie Learning | CIP Capital | 8 | Spun off from Carnegie Mellon U, Owned by Apollo until 2018 |
| EdGems | Privately held | 4 | Has a joint math project with McGraw Hill |
| Houghton Mifflin Harcourt | HMH | 5 | Has a joint math project with Big Ideas Learning |
| Math Nation | Study Edge, which is owned by Stemscopes/ Accelerate Learning | 10 | Spun off from UF Gainesville |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Agile Mind Educational Holdings | Private | 8 | Based in Grapevine, TX |
| Mathspace | Private | 4 | Based in Australia |
| Cengage | Apex Partners, KKR, Blackstone, and Searchlight Capital Partners | 4 | Has a joint math project with Big Ideas Learning |
| Bedford, Freeman and Worth | Holzbrinck Publishing Holdings | 1 | Holzbrinck is based in Stuttgart, and owns dozens of imprints, including Macmillan, Nature, Springer, Palgrave, St. Martin's, Farrer Straus Giroux.... |

Accelerate Learning (9 titles) is owned by the Carlyle Group and was helmed by Glenn Youngkin until he ran for Governor of Virginia on an anti-CRT campaign. Accelerate also owns MathNation (10 titles), giving the combined imprints 19 approved titles, only one fewer than the much larger company Savvas, which was spun off from textbook and testing giant Pearson in 2019. Grouping Cengage, Big Ideas Learning and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt together (they cooperate on math projects) gives them a combined share of 22 textbooks. Thus, out of the 93 total math texts approved by the FDOE, 61 (66%) came from one of three publishing groups. Florida was ahead of the rest of the country in certifying these companies' products as free of CRT, but it seems probable that other states will follow; given the weight of states like Texas in the K-12 textbook market, this development will not only affect textbooks sold to schools in states not under a CRT ban—it will also produce significant revenue for the publishing companies.

It should be noted that this three-stage model of disaster capitalism in education is cyclic: the profiteering in stage 3 is followed by a new disaster that demands neglect of public education. In the case of the anti-CRT bans, we are only beginning to enter the third stage with the Florida textbook procurement, but the outlines of the next moral panic are already visible in the pivot to anti-LGBTQ+ citizens and the crusade against Disney led, once again, by Christopher Rufo.

Countering Strategies

Effectively countering the anti-CRT bans and the underlying goals of White supremacy and disaster capitalism requires strategies that counter all three stages of disaster capitalism: countering the generation of disaster to neglect public resources, countering the disposal of teachers, students, and families, and countering the selling of private solutions to replace public resources. To this end, we suggest three counter-strategies: 1) reclaiming the narrative from those promoting moral panic, 2) litigating against the laws, policies, and regulations supporting the bans, and 3)

restoring the school-community relationship under attack by both moral panic and disaster capitalism, and using the solidarity developed between school and community as the base for transformative and generative action (Ball, 2009; Ball et al., 2021; Liu, 2020; Miller, et al., 2020; Miller & Liu, 2021). Undertaken with a sense of purpose and justice, these strategies should help counter the current anti-CRT moment and provide resilience for future moral panics and disaster capitalism.

Reclaiming the Narrative

The first task in countering the anti-CRT movement, and the underlying disaster capitalism, is to reclaim the narrative. This requires responding to disinformation not just with correction but with critical counter-narratives (Miller et al., 2020) from teachers, students, and families that uncover the players and the disaster capitalism strategies, making it clear that private profit from public education and epistemicide (Paraskeva, 2016) in public education are key goals in anti-CRT efforts. Reclaiming the narrative also requires developing and distributing model curricula that reframe historical and current events with the voices of minoritized groups. There are already several examples of this approach, including longstanding ones such as the Zinn History Project, and more recent ones such as the 1619 Project and the Asian American Curriculum Project. This task is vital to counteract the epistemicide perpetuated by the White supremacists currently directing the ideology of the anti-CRT movement. Undertaking these two tasks will clarify the links between White supremacy and disaster capitalism in education, and provide teachers, students, and families the materials needed to take back the narrative space in schools and the media currently occupied by the anti-CRT players.

Litigating Laws, Policies, and Regulations

In addition to reclaiming the narrative, opponents of the CRT bans also need to take actions against White supremacy and disaster capitalism in education. Although it is important not to be drawn into the surface tactics of the anti-CRT players instead of addressing the deeper strategic issues revealed above, that does not mean that the bans should be ignored. There have already been legal challenges on constitutional grounds by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in New Hampshire, Missouri, and Oklahoma, arguing that an anti-CRT ban “violates the free speech of students and teachers and denies students of color, LGBTQ students and girls the opportunity to learn their history” (Camera, 2021). Similar lawsuits have been filed by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). There have also been open records lawsuits in cases in which the rationale and implementation criteria for deciding which materials to ban have been kept secret (VPM News Sues Virginia Education Department, 2022). Although success in some of these lawsuits is not guaranteed—the US. Supreme Court has ruled that, as government employees, K-12 public school teachers do not have free speech rights in the classroom—the 2010 ban on “ethnic studies” in the Tucson Unified School District was ruled in violation of students’ rights to be informed (LoMonte, 2021), which suggests a potential avenue for litigation.

Restore School-Community Relationships for Transformative Action

Retaking control of the narrative and fighting the CRT bans in court are important responses to the immediate challenge of the anti-CRT movement, but ultimately it is the way CRT

bans link White supremacy and disaster capitalism that needs to be addressed. Here the problem is the way in which disaster capitalism attacks the relationship between school and community by rendering teachers, students, and families disposable, removing them from decision making or even oversight of the privatized public resources (Miller & Liu, 2021). In the case of the disaster capitalism associated with the anti-CRT movements, approaches to restore the school-community relationship must focus on organizing teachers, students, and families for both medium- and long-term efforts. These efforts should include 1) contesting far-right control of school and library boards to ensure community oversight of curriculum and procurement; 2) Moving toward community-based schools and teacher education to better represent students and families the schools serve; 3) Promoting formative evaluation approaches to teaching and teacher education, such as qualitative portfolios rather than high-stakes testing that are less amenable to replacement with private solutions; 4) Promoting community actions to hinder disaster capitalism, such as boycotts and protests aimed at disaster capitalist operations of scripted lessons, canned curriculum, and teaching and learning standards unmoored from the community.

Conclusion

To return to George Mosse, we observe that there are two parts to his quote. First, Mosse observed, “The importance of racial thought is misunderstood if only its absurdity and bad taste are seen and the continuation within it of an older and ‘respectable’ trend is ignored.” In the context of the anti-CRT movement, the lesson is clear that we need to look beyond the absurdity of the current moment and see the continuity with older, more “respectable” attempts to solidify White supremacy and divert the resources of public education to private profit. The second part of the quote tells us, “German anti-Semitism is a part of German intellectual history, it does not stand outside it.” The lesson for us is that the present moment, with all its absurdity, is not an aberration in an otherwise exemplary socio-political system. It is the logical outgrowth of how U.S. political and educational systems developed from and by means of White supremacy and racial capitalism, linking socio-economic modalities from slavery to the carceral capitalism (Wang, 2018) that has only intensified the more it has been resisted—and this, in and of itself, provides elegant proof of what CRT scholars from Derrick Bell forward have been saying. It is worth remembering, however, that by the time Mosse wrote those words (1958), although Germany seemed to have learned the lesson he hoped to make, the U.S. had not. The question is, is there still time for the U.S. to learn Mosse’s lesson?

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Contributors

Brittany Aronson is an Associate Professor of Teacher Education at Pennsylvania State University and teaches classes in social justice and anti-racist education. In her scholarship, she focuses on preparing educators to work against oppression as well as critical policy analyses of both popular and political discourse. Her research interests include critical teacher preparation, social justice education, critical race theory, critical whiteness studies, and educational policy. Dr. Aronson earned a PhD in Learning Environments and Educational Studies from the University of Tennessee in 2014.

Arnetha F. Ball is the Charles E. Ducommun Endowed Professor (Emerita) in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University. She is a Professor (Emerita) in the Curriculum Studies, Teacher Education, Educational Linguistics, and Social Sciences in Education Programs. She previously served as the inaugural Chair of the Cross Area Cross Disciplinary Program in Race, Inequality, and Language in Education (RILE) and as Director of the University's Program in African and African American Studies. Her recent work focuses on the development of blended online professional development that prepares teachers to work with diverse student populations and on the implementation of her Model of Generative Change (2009, 2012) in transnational contexts.

Racheal M. Banda is an Assistant Professor in the department of Teaching, Curriculum, and Educational Inquiry at Miami University. Dr. Banda's specialization in cultural studies within education, provides her with an interdisciplinary, critical perspective as scholar and teacher educator. More specifically, her research and teaching take up issues of equity and justice through a sociospacial and Chicana feminist consideration of how the notion of community has been significant across the educational experiences of historically marginalized students.

Jennifer Bradley My work is guided both by the students in front of me and the multiple worlds in which we move. In the classroom, we work together to build an environment where voices are heard, where identities are valued, and where we immerse ourselves in projects and topics that matter. As a White woman who holds many privileged identities, my current research projects explore the urgency of this moment and the intersections of identity, racial justice, and educational activism. In the last few years, I have presented my research at several conferences, including: the American Educational Research Association; Free Minds, Free People; First Up!; The Association for the Study of Play; and the Society for Ethics Across the Curriculum. I am currently working towards three publications: a special issue article, an invited book chapter, and an invited book proposal. These works in progress highlight the work that young children, educators, and families are doing to understand, disrupt, and transform the systems of oppression in which we all operate.

Érica Fernández is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Miami University, Ohio. Her research is anchored and inspired by the experience of her parents who were themselves formerly undocumented Mexican immigrants. Because of the influence of her parents in her life and work, Dr. Fernández's research specifically focuses on the parent organizing initiatives of un/documented Latina/o/x parents, which centrally positions them as educational and community leaders

and activists. In doing so, her collaborative research with and alongside un/documented Latina/o/x parents challenges and expands notions of who and what counts as leaders and leadership.

Tricia Gray is assistant professor of practice at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her pedagogy draws together commitments to critical pedagogy, democratic education, and constructivism. Her fifteen years as a high school Spanish teacher in contested spaces—including an urban context, a public school located on Tribal lands of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and an exurban community experiencing demographic change—inform her work in meaningful ways. She teaches a variety of courses in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education. Dr. Gray also serves as the faculty sponsor for the UNL chapter of the Nebraska Student Education Association's Aspiring Educators (NSEA AE) and the Exploring Queer Teacher Identities (EQTI) organizations. Dr. Gray's research questions explore how young people construct citizen identities in school and aim to center and amplify the experiences of marginalized young people to inform more equitable and justice-oriented schooling.

Carl D. Greer is a third-year Ph.D. student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Originally from Milwaukee, WI, Greer earned his BA in psychology from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and a dual master of educational leadership and policy and social work at the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor. Greer's youth worker and educator background within Milwaukee and Detroit contexts inspired him to pursue doctoral training in becoming a community-focused tenure track faculty member that examines how the relationship between schools and community-based education spaces can holistically develop Black youth. His current scholarship examines the attempt to erase racially minoritized communities' narratives by censoring Critical Race Theory and other social justice frameworks (e.g., equity, ethnic studies, multiculturalism) in schools.

Kevin Lawrence Henry, Jr. is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Henry's interdisciplinary program of research and teaching revolves around two central, interrelated questions. The first question critically examines how power and dominance shape and structure educational policies, practices, and reforms. His second question is concerned with how Black educational actors understand, resist, reconstitute, and transform educational fields to be equitable, just, and humanizing. More specifically, Dr. Henry's research investigates: the racialized lived realities of charter schools and school choice policy and practice; the persistence of anti-Blackness in education; neoliberalism and educational markets; and culturally relevant and restorative justice approaches in education. Dr. Henry's work is informed by Black Studies, Critical Race Theory, Feminist Theories, and Queer of Color Critique. Dr. Henry's teaching and mentoring aims to inspire and engender community, collaboration, and care, intellectual creativity and curiosity, and a commitment to freedom. Prior to returning to Wisconsin, Dr. Henry served on faculty at the University of Arizona in the College of Education and was a founding member of and policy fellow in the Education Policy Center.

Uma Mazyck Jayakumar is an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education at University of California, Riverside. Her scholarship and teaching address racial justice and policy issues in higher education, with a focus on how institutional environments such as campus climates and cultures shape college access and outcomes and how students' experience and resist barriers

to inclusive engagement. Jayakumar received her doctorate in Higher Education and Organizational Change from the University of California at Los Angeles. Prior to UCR she was a Faculty Associate at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan and an Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco, where she cofounded a Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) master's program with a mission of transforming organizational environments toward increasing racial diversity, justice, and inclusion. Jayakumar's research has been generously supported by postdoctoral fellowship awards from the National Center for Institutional Diversity (2008–2009), the National Academy of Education/Spencer (2013–2014), and the Ford Foundation (2014–2015).

DeMarcus Jenkins is an activist and urban scholar whose work considers the intersections of race, space, and policy. His research focuses on the influence of spatial, social, and political factors that foster and exacerbate inequalities for Black populations, as well as the approaches that school leaders take to disrupt and transform these dynamics. His interdisciplinary approach to tackling complex and challenging racial equity problems in schools is informed by Black critical theory, critical spatial theory, Black geographies, critical policy studies, and justice-oriented leadership frameworks. Consistent throughout his research are practical solutions for school leaders and policymakers.

Benjamin Kearl is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Purdue University Fort Wayne.

Rita Kohli is an Associate Professor of Teaching and Teacher Education in the Education, Society, and Culture Program of the School of Education, and serves as Cooperating Faculty in the Ethnic Studies Department at the University of California, Riverside (UCR). A former Oakland Unified School District teacher, she is also the co-founder and co-director of the Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice, and currently serves as the coordinator for UCR Teacher Education Program's K-12 Ethnic Studies Pathway. Her research examines racialization and racial justice initiatives within K-12 schools and teacher education, with a focus on the professional experiences and wellbeing of teachers of color. She is the co-editor of the book, *Confronting Racism in Teacher Education: Narratives from Teacher Educators*, and author of the book published by Harvard Education Press, *Teachers of Color: Resisting Racism and Reclaiming Education*. Kohli was the recipient the UCR Innovator for Social Change Award (2016), the Scholar Activist and Community.

Katrina Liu earned her Ph.D in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with specializations in teacher education and educational leadership and policy analysis. Dr. Liu's current research includes preparing critically reflective teachers for transformative learning, developing self-sustaining communities of practice for teacher professional development, and understanding social capital and resilience among teachers of color. Her work has been published in journals such as *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, *Educational Review*, and *The Social Studies*. Dr. Liu has also secured and managed several grants including a Fulbright Group Projects Abroad award for teacher professional development overseas and a University of Wisconsin-Whitewater outreach grant to support teachers to implement personalized learning in their classrooms.

Cheryl E. Matias After almost 25 years in the academy as a student, graduate student, educator, research assistant, and now a motherscholar and woman faculty of color, earning my degrees and tenure were difficult. There were many barriers, hidden pathways, and unspoken rules that I had to learn. Upon tenure I decided to support other faculty of color, women, motherscholars, and other diverse faculty and students in academia, especially, those who are doing socially just work. In supporting them I noticed a need for academic coaching that improves publication productivity, streamlining and organizing our publishing, conferencing, and teaching, and dissertating. I also noticed a need for race and identity coaching that will enhance academic and racial well-being and give skillsets on how to navigate and advocate under academic harassment, bullying, and racial or gender microaggressions. Instead of going it alone, I now provide services to support faculty in obtaining tenure, universities in practicing racially inclusive practices, and graduate students in obtaining a degree and academic positions. I even provide race and identity coaching for those who need the support as they tirelessly engaging in racially just advocacy.

Edwin Mayorga is a parent, educator, scholar, activist and podcaster working for justice. An Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Studies and the Program in Latin American and Latino Studies at Swarthmore College (PA), his work centers on cultural political economic examinations of urbanism, urban education policy, Latinx education, digital social science, racial/ethnic studies and teaching for social justice.

Richard Miller is Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology. His current projects include the study of global popular music, the rise of Western-style music and music studies in East Asia, and issues of diversity in K-12 and higher education. Although he sometimes describes himself as a “lapsed percussionist,” Richard is an accomplished performer, teacher, and leader of the gamelan music of Central Java, having studied with American, European, and Indonesian experts for more than 25 years. A seasoned teacher, he has taught Ethnomusicology and Music History courses, East Asian Studies courses, and Teacher Education courses in multiple universities in the United States and China.

Jennifer Esposito Norris is a Department Chair and Professor of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University. Her research interests include intersectional research and popular culture as a site of education.

ben ray is a doctoral student at the University of Alabama. His work considers student debt and its effects as issues of social justice. Generally, he is interested in graduate student life, academic institutions, and philosophies of higher education.

Ganiva Reyes is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teaching, Curriculum, and Educational Inquiry at Miami University, Oxford Ohio. Her research revolves around intersectionality, Chicana feminist theory, and pedagogies of care to provide a nuanced approach to topics of diversity and inclusion in teacher education. She uses feminist of color and Chicana/Latina feminist theories to make sense of the everyday educational lives of students and teachers. She also integrates culturally relevant teaching, ethics of care, and feminist of color theorizing to show how teachers can re-envision their roles as teachers to be part of a support network for culturally and

linguistically diverse students. More specifically, she explores the intimate and interpersonal aspects of teaching, and how teachers need communal and institutional support to provide the same for their students. For example, her work about the interactions between Latina mothering students and their teachers, along the U.S/Mexico border, reveals important lessons about teacher practices and pedagogy born from the knowledges of Latinx populations.

Erin C. Scussel is a PhD student in the Educational Policy Studies program at Georgia State University. Her research interests include agnotology, epistemology, political discourse analysis, and education policy analysis.

Kara Mitchell Viesca's research focuses on advancing equity in the policy and practice of educator development with a particular focus on teachers of multilingual learners (both regular content teachers and language specialists). For a decade (from 2011-2021) she led \$4.6 million dollars of federal grants focused on improving teaching and learning for multilingual students and their teachers. As part of this work many online materials were developed to support both teacher and student learning.

Mark White is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where he focuses on the intersection of race and class in public schools. Before beginning his doctoral studies, Mark earned a BA in English from Huntingdon College in Montgomery, AL. His research centers on how school districts navigate policies and political rhetoric related to school choice while striving to provide an equitable education despite various challenges both internal and external to their region. Drawing from his upbringing in rural Georgia, Mark has developed a strong appreciation for the crucial relationship between public schools and the broader community, and his passion for education equity at the intersection of policy and practice motivates his work.

Alexa Yunes-Koch is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education. She is a Graduate Research Assistant with Dr. Kara Viesca and Dr. Ladan Saidi, working with neuroimaging and biometric data to understand more about the brain, emotion, and cognition in teaching and learning.