

Troubling Hegemonic Racialized Ideologies in Education with Critical Race Theory

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Abstract

As an epistemological, axiological, and methodological paradigm, Critical Race Theory (CRT; Crenshaw et al., 2000; Harris, 1993) is a scholarly tool to identify and disrupt inequities, possible via CRT's core tenets towards troubling systemic racism. We argue that political movements in North Carolina (NC) exhibit attempts to delegitimize critical race scholarship and curricula that accurately portray history and contemporary student populations' racialized experiences, a manifestation of the conservative agenda to whitewash the state's history that is predicated on racism and white supremacy. In alignment with radical theorizations and research that examine ideologies at the root of ill-informed hysteria, we present a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the effects of political power in foreclosing educational possibilities toward building equitable societies through our analysis of data from NC's Fairness and Accountability in the Classroom for Teachers and Students for North Carolinian "FACTS" submissions (Robinson, 2021). FACTS is a reporting tool targeting NC educators who employ critical lenses in their instruction that promotes unfounded antagonism toward CRT. The significance of this research is a localized example of CRT being targeted by conservative politicians toward the intent of delegitimizing critical scholarship and education and thus perpetuating ahistorical ideals rooted in racism and white supremacy.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, counterstories, public education, southern epistemology, whiteness, white supremacy, race consciousness, conservative ideology, North Carolina

Introduction

North Carolina (NC) is a southern state where politicized issues are contested and where People of Color have always made home and recently show robust growth. From 2010 to 2020 the NC population of "some other race" evidenced 207% of growth (Tippett, 2021). Public education and increased visibility of People of Color are politicized in NC, a purple or swing state, and inform localized contestation regarding Critical Race Theory (CRT; Crenshaw et al., 2000; Harris, 1993). Thus, the present manuscript investigates: What discourses reproduce or resist racialization and racism in a southern state?

We conceptually orient this research through the theory and method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, Wodak, 2009); correspondingly, we adopt the political stance of opposing white

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supremacy.² Furthermore, concepts from historicized racialized ideologies chart the genealogical trajectory of race and racism, past-to-present, situating NC's contemporary conservative agenda as a byproduct of racialized and racist dynamics from history (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wilder, 2014) including movements to de-historicize education alongside resistance to acknowledging racialization and racism.³

In 2021, Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson (R-NC) launched the “Fairness and Accountability in Classrooms for Teachers and Students” (FACTS) taskforce to “monitor the state of affairs in North Carolina’s classrooms” (2021). In the Carolina Journal, Bass (2021) quoted Robinson as specifying the FACTS taskforce’s objective “Our task force set about to answer one question: Is there indoctrination happening in our public schools. After doing this report and after doing this task force, the overwhelming answer is yes, it is” (para. 3). Robinson has spoken at a slew of conservative events, including pro-Trump rallies (Frisbie-Fulton, 2022). Across venues, Robinson has consistently denounced LGBTQ+ and queer identities in speeches and filmed sermons (Bruno & McMillan, 2023; NC Democratic Party, 2023), which Robinson has used over the past 2.5 years to stump for his extreme conservative bid for governor, informally announced in April, 2023.

The FACTS taskforce’s solicitation of reports on teachers and schools targets critical perspectives in education and coincides with Robinson’s now-confirmed bid for governor. Eradicating what Robinson terms “woke” ideology and CRT in education are a central pillar of his campaign platform. For example, in an interview with She Thinks Podcast (Hollberg & Robinson, 2021), Robinson stated that “We [referring to Black and white people] defeated slavery together. We defeated Jim Crow together. ...CRT will take us backwards not forwards” (para. 30). The FACTS webpage describes what people should report, albeit in vague terms, (Appendix A) and includes an online submission questionnaire (Appendix B). The FACTS taskforce additionally published the responses ($N = 581$) submitted online; these responses comprise the data source for this research. The publicly available submissions do not include demographic information for the people who submitted. We draw from the NC FACTS (2021) publicly-available database of responses as a secondary data source. As evidenced in the Findings section, the submissions to FACTS reflect the discourses of undermining racial justice and upholding white supremacy, for which Lt. Gov. Robinson (R-NC) is known. FACTS is a political maneuver to erode public education and concretize conservative ideologies like anti-intellectualism, whitewashing, and ahistorical views of race relations (Pinar & Kincheloe, 1999; Whitaker et al., 2018).

2. “White supremacy” refers to the ideologies, or ideas, that center beliefs, traits, and norms associated with whiteness (Gutierrez, 2006; Racial Equity Tools, 2020); the corollary concept from CRT, whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), draws from legal conceptions of real property mapped onto the racial hierarchies present in the U.S. to demonstrate how whiteness, and proximity to whiteness, is systemically valorized in correspondence with stigmatization and devaluation of People of Color and their advancement in society broadly.

3. “Racialization” and “racism” have distinct operational definitions based on the level of attribution. “Racialization” refers to individual-level assumptions of another’s race (Racial Equity Tools, 2020) or when someone with an unknown “othered” subjectivity—a continuum of privileged/oppressed racialized identities—“races” another person or group, or categorizes them as within a specific race based on assumptions, stereotypes, or physicality. By contrast, “racism” is structural, even in individual-level instances, because of enmeshment in racial group-based power and oppression. Thus, racism is systematic discrimination based on race (Racial Equity Tools, 2020). To reiterate, racialization is an individual’s assumption of another’s race while racism is a hierarchy of group-based privilege and oppression arising from assumptions of race.

Historicizing Racialized Ideologies

Historicity situated the present inquiry as it pertains to the centrality of race and racism. However, historicizing does not propose the present or future as intractable but instead affords an informed view of the presents' origins and potentialities. Correspondingly, American higher education was constructed by enslaved African, West Indian, and Indigenous peoples (Wilder, 2014) upon Indigenous peoples' lands that settler colonists stole (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021). Enslaved peoples' forced labor was used to create the first U.S. colleges through white settlers' social positions, accumulated wealth (Wilder, 2014), and settler colonial racial ideologies, e.g., white colonizers perpetuating a racial underclass (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021). Dunbar-Ortiz (2021) historicized contemporary U.S. nationalism—American exceptionalism—and ongoing racialized capitalism derivative of settler colonialism, including white supremacist fears of replacement, so-called “white genocide” (p. 229). Immigration and naturalization laws have consistently prioritized the easy admittance of populations deemed white, or proximal to whiteness (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021).⁴ Additionally, racialized trauma in NC—site of the present research—extends beyond WWII; without informed consent, more than 7,000 Black North Carolinians were forcibly sterilized, as late as 1973 (NPR, 2011). No NC politician has acknowledged or offered reparation for the state's violence against People of Color. These violent legacies of reproducing racial hierarchy historically situate contemporary racism central to the conservative agenda within the state. Specific to NC, recent movements to target CRT in education function to perpetuate racism: CRT is a tool to identify, theorize, and disrupt racial injustice, so calling for its removal from educational contexts will further setback movements toward racial justice and healing from racial trauma.

Contemporary Racialized Ideologies

Racialized ideologies are reproduced with whiteness as ideal (Crenshaw et al. 2000; Harris, 1993). This manuscript conceptualizes whiteness as the dominant racial ideology, predominating in public education, founded on sectarian reification. As a system, whiteness refers to racialized social structures of privilege and oppression that differentially distribute privileges/oppressions, not individual racial identity (Harris, 1993; Matias & Mackey, 2016). Social construction of whiteness “preserves racial subordination” (Gutierrez, 2006, p. 26), including unearned accumulated wealth and (white) privilege (Harris, 1993).

Relatedly, Gutierrez (2006) theorized selectively opting-out from race/racialized engagements in education “white innocence,” theoretically grounded in whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) and race evasion. White innocence (Gutierrez, 2006) leverages whiteness as property, including racialized privileges, to claim superiority *from* racialization, abnegation from collective, cross-racial responsibility to advance structural racial equity, and pretend that other groups are not racialized and demoted in the racial hierarchy. Precluding oneself from the acceptance of the impacts of racism and racialization is a privilege of whiteness with educational origins in 1990s-era

4. U.S. immigration and naturalization laws present a shifting goal post when examined over time; in 1790, the Act to Establish a Uniform Rule of Naturalization codified whiteness as the standard for European immigrants admitted to the U.S. (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021). Also, Ong (1996) accounted for the racialized binary that immigrants and refugees settled in the U.S. encounter whereby, at the time, certain Asian peoples were whitened—and thus deemed more acceptable or palatable for assimilation—while other groups were endarkened and encountered greater levels of racism and oppression. Collectively, the transitional and unfixed standards of whiteness are rendered visible through historicity.

multiculturalism. Race evasion ideologically underplays complicity in hierarchies of racial power (Crenshaw et al., 2000) and, in education, stultifies educators' critical reflection on classrooms as microcosms of racialized social hierarchies (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). In higher education, Bondi (2012) reported the effects of whiteness as property in student affairs preparation resulting in *de facto* segregation. Race evasion and white innocence are compounding concepts with the byproduct of ignoring their effects on People of Color.

NC is a southern state where whiteness is entangled with notions of tradition and politeness politics. Tradition entails multiple, diversely interpreted majoritarian positions of identity, religion, and, endemic to the region, politeness politics—an expression of white innocence and race evasion, a refusal to acknowledge realities of racialized oppression to maintain privileges of whiteness. Collectively, these forms of traditionalism are conceptualized through the southern epistemology that whitewashes the atrocities of slavery in favor of anti-intellectualism, romanticizing the past and minimizing the presence of contemporary racism (Camargo et al., 2021; Ramos et al., 2022; Whitaker et al., 2018). We argue that these regional manifestations of whiteness culminate in an extreme conservative agenda.

Especially in schools, conservative ideologies demand neutralized, sanitized instruction that does not disrupt romanticized illusions of equality and race neutrality. Seated in conservative masculine subjectivities (Ong, 1996), they evoke seemingly-harmless curricula that celebrate nationalistic ideals and Christian-centric holidays. Departure—white flight—results when demands for these traditionalist ideologies in education are not heeded; conservatives' children opt-out of contentious assignments (Haviland, 2008) or depart public schooling (Donnor, 2021; Zhang, 2009). Extreme adherents of whiteness flee to educational enclaves accommodating the conservative agenda, a contemporary form of segregation and an expression of the southern epistemology's anti-intellectualism (Camargo et al., 2021; Ramos et al., 2022; Whitaker et al., 2018). By situating our research amid these strands of scholarship, we argue that white supremacy is deeply-entrenched in the U.S. south's public education. Collectively, ideologies of race and racism—whiteness/white supremacy—and corresponding white flight are central to extremist conservative agendas in education.

Counterstories of Resistance to Injustice

We operationally define counterstories for the purpose of this manuscript in alignment with Solórzano and Yosso's (2012) conceptualization which accounted for counterstories as the narratives of those who are underrepresented or marginalized. Primarily, this definition encompasses those in NC who oppose the majoritarian conservative movement and may include school leaders, staff, and community members. Counterstories empower People of Color and other minoritized communities to narrate their own reality and disrupt hegemonic narratives of subordination (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Majoritarian, dominant views valorize whiteness and white supremacy; by contrast, resistance unsettles the supposed dominance of whiteness through racially-conscious advancement of generative and valuable contributions from minoritized people (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Racial equity in education requires counterstories (Ramos & Yi, 2020), to resist deficit framings and hegemonic ideologies. This inquiry operationalized counterstories as resistance to conservatives' vilification of educators who historicize the curricula. CRT as a tool for refusing racism promotes transformation to disrupt inequitable educational norms (Matias & Mackey, 2017).

Researchers' Reflexivity

A major emphasis of productive critical scholarship is to examine researchers' positionality within their work; as scholars, as such, we reflected on our positionality as we examined our own identities in relation to power, privilege, oppression, and histories (Pérez Huber et al., 2018) and connections to the present study. Dr. Catherine Bennett is an anti-racist white woman committed to advancing educational equity and justice and disrupting racialized educational exclusion predicated on white supremacy. I enter this work as a queer, southern, first-generation Ph.D. to advance scholarship and practice that empirically advances historically minoritized groups' assets and knowledges. Although I was born in Germany and have lived around the world, I have lived in NC since 2015; however, I call it home because this is where I have joined communities working for people power and an equitable society.

Dr. Delma Ramos enters this work as a Mexican immigrant woman of color and a first-generation Ph.D. My personal and professional experience inform the focus of my work on examining how hegemonic ideology shapes the day-to-day experiences of People of Color. With a commitment to disrupt systems of oppression, I enter this work focused on the impact of attacks to CRT on the possibilities for education to foster transformation and mobilization toward justice.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, Wodak, 2009) framed this research. This section addresses the conceptual components of the theory applied to this research. Issues of power and reproduction of power imbalances are integral to CDA's purpose as discourses—speech, writing, and expression—both reflect and reinforce ideologies that center or reproduce power imbalances (Wodak, 2009). CDA also posits the necessity of identifying and naming a political stance at the core of the research and reflexively evaluating researcher positions (Wodak, 2009). Thus, we adopt the equity issue of resisting white supremacy and promoting anti-racism and racial justice as essential within educational settings. More specifically, our inquiry centers politicized movements in NC that attempt to denounce CRT in public education. Attacking CRT essentializes the lived experiences of People of Color; CRT bans reproduce racial inequity through attempts to whitewash, neutralize, and sanitize systemic racism oppression; political rhetoric denouncing CRT as a viable theoretical, analytic, and educational tool that further entrenches racialized injustice by denigrating the knowledge of, by, and for the advancement of racially minoritized groups.

Concepts central to CDA—discourses, ideologies, and power imbalances—are enlivened by contemporary literature that addresses matters of racial justice pertinent to this research. Furthermore, by its nature of accounting for discourse in terms of the written word as well as discourses amid the sociopolitical context, CDA is a suitable methodology for this research. In the matter of written discourse, we analyzed submissions to the NC FACTS taskforce, addressed in the Methodology section; additionally, we accounted for the discourses circulating in NC surrounding conservatism, especially regarding race in education education. Thus, the following sections address concepts drawn from white supremacy and racialization/racism (see footnotes 1 and 2 respectively), critical studies of whiteness (Bondi, 2012; Gutierrez, 2006; Harris, 1993; Haviland, 2008), historicizing racialized ideologies (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021; Ong, 1996; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wilder, 2014), and counterstories that resist racialized ideologies (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Methodology

The critical qualitative paradigm (Denzin, 2017) methodologically frames this research through critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2009) to promote generative critique. As discourses that mirror and reproduce ideologies sustaining power imbalances are central to CDA, the unit of analysis on which we focus accounts for ideologies that support racial justice and denigrate movements to equitably incorporate racial justice in NC's education system. More specifically, the unit of analysis draws from the discourses and discursive climate surrounding the topic hysteria around CRT in the state of NC.

Our data included 581 reports from 2021-2022 to NC's FACTS taskforce, which is a conservative political movement to surveille educators for indoctrination in the classroom—including teaching CRT - started by Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson (R-NC). The FACTS taskforce called for anonymous submissions to an online reporting tool to target educators for a range of infractions including “students being subjected to indoctrination according to a political agenda or ideology, whether through assigned work, teacher comments, or a hostile classroom environment” (Robinson, 2021). The submission form for the NC FACTS taskforce did not ask for demographic information from those making reports; submissions were published online and publicly available.

Analytic Strategy

Aligned with qualitative criticality and CDA, we conducted two rounds of a priori concept-driven coding related to the discursive political climate in NC. Beginning in January of 2021, we co-taught a doctoral course on critical theory, which prompted our thinking about theorizing NC's political landscape as we revisited foundational literature on Critical Race Theory (e.g., Crenshaw, Combahee River Collective). A priori codes were distilled from the literature through multiple reflective researcher meetings held in early fall 2021; after seven meetings, we agreed upon the concepts incorporated in the conceptual orientation. The methodological decision to rely upon a priori coding pertains to our onto-epistemological commitments to racial justice alongside the axiological commitment to substantiate the concepts of foundational CRT. This feature of our research design is additionally consistent with CDA in which a social justice issue is foregrounded and takes a priori importance throughout the research. Once our concepts were clear, we divided the 581 submissions to read and conduct a priori coding. Throughout the coding process, we had check-in conversations to assess if the a priori codes remained suitable; they required little refinement. Furthermore, we conducted intercoder reviews for agreement between the coding rounds and according to the purpose of the investigation (Saldaña, 2015). FACTS submissions are completely anonymous, therefore, the direct quotes presented to illustrate our findings do not name specific reporting parties.

Findings

Publicly-available NC FACTS submissions⁵ suggest themes of a conservative agenda, ideologies of race, racialization, and racism, and ideological effects in public education. Proportionally fewer responses evidence counterstories supporting educators who historicize their teaching as embedded within ongoing legacies of white supremacy and resulting racialization and racism. FACTS submissions are completely anonymous, therefore, the direct quotes presented to illustrate our findings do not name specific reporting parties.

Conservative Agenda

Manifestations of a conservative agenda are evident in reports of school activities, teaching, and learning in NC public schools that reporting parties perceive as oppositional to the values of this “great country.” Broadly, the complaints reference values rooted in Christianity intertwined with denials of racism and racialization and the desire for education disengaged from politics yet commensurate with conservative ideals. Holistically, these reports document the conservative agenda.

Christianity is a feature of this conservative agenda, intertwined with denials of racism and racialization. Statements contrasted the faith’s beliefs as misaligned with teaching for racial justice. For example, a reporting party stated:

NC is seeing/aiding an indoctrination of curriculum by a "club"...allowed to go into the classrooms at school and "teach" about white privilege and other matters not appropriate to be taught in the classroom. As a Christian, I am offended by their teaching.

This report signaled that discussing topics such as white privilege are off-limits in the classroom for their subversion of white Christian privilege. Another statement below clarified these ideas:

My husband Bob and I are parents and Christians. We had to remove our daughters from public schools because too many teachers were talking about color way too much. We do not see color in this family. WWJD? [What would Jesus do?] Jesus would be color blind. Our public schools have to be more color blind so that school is more positive for all the children.

Especially, this statement connects notions of Christianity with romanticized ideas of race-neutrality where the presence and consequences of racism are nonexistent. Reporting parties also evidence a strong conviction that CRT is anti-Christianity. This is expressed in reports that claim: “I have read several articles about the Critical Race Theory. I have 2 grandchildren... [and] feel very concerned that this theory is being pushed... without Christian parents even aware.” Collectively, the positioning of Christianity as a marker of whiteness and white privilege appears to be threatened by the addition of racial justice discussions to the NC K-12 curricula. This dynamic evidences

5. In an attempt to shame NC public educators, many reports to FACTS (Robinson, 2021) name specific teachers, leaders, and schools, in some cases with contact information. We have redacted this information to protect educators’ and schools’ identities and instead include [teacher] or [school] in included quotations. However, where participants name themselves or elected officials, those names have been retained as submitted.

Christianity as a strong foundation for the shaping and maintenance of a conservative agenda in NC education.

Likewise, a call for K-12 education that is non-partisan but that deploys conservatism is present throughout the reports. This idea is illustrated below:

I've also sent emails to the administration suggesting that teachers remain politically/ideologically neutral when facilitating discussions (since several have tended to clearly promote leftist ideology and denigrate other points of view). They've presented the 1619 project as genuine, definitive history and have been known to use multiple Howard Zinn references.

This statement urges teachers to not engage students in topics that provide counterstories for the understanding of taken-for-granted facts such as conservative whitewashed views of history. These claims for conservatism are often linked to what reporting parties define as propaganda: "Teachers often ridicule right-wing perspectives... The reading lists and materials...are full of leftist propaganda." Furthermore, reports of teachings that disrupt status quo understandings are often accompanied by demands for schools and educators to distance themselves from politics. For example, a reporting party suggested: "This teacher makes it no secret he is a democrat, he should play a non-partisan role while in school. I...wanted you aware of the bias in this classroom." Similar ideas are echoed in statements like "the school has a 'Black Lives Matter' mural at the entrance. First off, I am wondering why a public, tax-funded school is able to engage in politics, especially with young children."

The enactment of a conservative agenda in reports of NC K-12 institutions and educators exposes the bond between public education and hegemonic discourse centered around Christianity and ideals that sustain the status quo. Collectively, the presence of conservatism across reports to the taskforce displays the urge for public education to halt efforts that sustain education for justice as these movements threaten the privilege of white Christian stakeholders.

Ideologies of Race and Racism

Ideologies reproduce racialized hierarchies central to the conservative agenda's beliefs about race and racism. Racism was present in the FACTS data through multiple responses attempting to delegitimize history instruction. One representative response decried instruction about enslavement practiced in NC:

...this so-called teacher tried to indoctrinate MY CHILD into believing that MY STATE was formed as a destination for slaves!...all of this talk about slavery...is JUST WRONG. You MUST DO SOMETHING to stop this liberal plot from indoctrinating my children.

This parent claims education about NC and slavery is indoctrination and also attempts to undermine the instructor's authority to accurately teach history. Additional respondents pursue delegitimizing history instruction. One parent stated:

My son's ELA teacher has been talking about slavery...[and] referred back to 1619 and I was really upset about this. Another person she discussed was a Hispanic named

Chavez,...the passage about him...basically made Republicans sound like they hated Hispanics...Everyone knows how bad slavery was, but...I don't hear any of these teachers talking about Hitler and how he tried to take out a whole race of people!

This response's multiple qualms feature racist undertones. First, this parent complains about the instructor's attention to slavery and outlines a negative emotional response to students' assigned text from 1619, a key date in the beginnings of slavery in then British Colonies, and now southern U.S. states. Next, the respondent attempts to problematize the curriculum to increase instruction about the Holocaust. This respondent claims that "everyone knows how bad slavery was" and then ascribes "race" to Jewish people, which are unified as a religious and cultural group, not a race; this racist fallacy was also central to the rise of fascism under the Nazi regime. These findings demonstrate racialized ideologies within white supremacy and erroneous, ahistorical understandings of slavery and ongoing racial hierarchy reproduction.

Ideological Effects on Education

Ideologies that sustain racial hierarchies, termed "anti-antiracism," are integral of the conservative agenda. Findings demonstrate desired ideological effects of controlling public education. Specifically, these ideological effects manifest in white flight from public schools and reporting teachers and schools.

white flight refers to parents electing or threatening to remove their children from public school or assignments due to a mismatch between democratic education, including the truth of slavery and contemporary racism, and parents' conservative ideologies. Multiple respondents to FACTS demand their students be exempted from coursework the parents do not agree with, as this parent states: "We have always been big proponents of public education but we are now pulling our kids out of the system to avoid indoctrination." Another representation of white flight includes: "Had I known this charter school was going to be focused on social justice indoctrination I never would have put my child there." Claims of indoctrination among the data evidenced parents' stance against antiracist education, resulting in white flight.

Respondents also named concepts perceived as components of indoctrination and demonstrated ideological effects of conservatism in policing education. For example, a conservative parent stated:

...Black Lives Matter, white privilege...were shoved down the throats of every student! My daughters quickly learned to just write papers...from the teacher's point of view...supporting the BLM movement...They are not racists...with so much focus on racism, they...played the game.

Further, submissions reflect claims against teachers' training, legitimacy, and abilities. This quotation is representative of attacks on teachers following parental complaints about social justice topics in class:

I demanded transitioning him to a different classroom...the teacher he transitioned to was an Educator, not a person with a hidden agenda like the other teacher.

Additionally, responses centered parents' issues with students' learning about antiracism. This excerpt is representative of respondents naming teachers and attempting to shame them for incorporating antiracist perspectives; the teacher asked:

...students [to] discuss why our paper currency only had while [sic] male slave owners on it. My son came and got me so I could hear the conversation. [Teacher] repeatedly commented with a deragatory [sic] tone about how while [sic] male slave owners should not be representing our country.

FACTS respondents attempt shaming teachers by name and enumerating their instructional practices. Another representative data point of policing educators states: "I no longer want my tax dollars funding a socialist tenure system where my kids are being taught depraved communism with no end in sight and no way to punish those who are perpetuating the indoctrination." This respondent seeks "to punish" educators that they accuse of "depraved communism" and "indoctrination." These data, instead, demonstrate respondents' white supremacist ideologies, deployed to reinscribe their conservative agenda under the guise of "traditionalist" and race evading curricula.

Resistance to white Supremacy Culture

Amidst a multitude of claims targeting critical ideology present in NC K-12 curricula, multiple submissions, from parents and teachers serving NC public schools, echoed support for equity, social justice, and race-conscious education. These submissions represent counterstories that challenge majoritarian stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) promoted in other reports by highlighting the importance of teaching critical thinking and providing students access to knowledge that equips them to think for themselves.

Related to critical thinking, counterstories pushed against hegemonic, taken-for-granted conservative knowledge promoted by politicians to grow supporters. This respondents' statement in a FACT submission illustrates this idea:

I indoctrinate my students year after year into understanding that you must read, think about, and understand things before you criticize them. I know that goes against the philosophy of your fearless, racist leader, Mark Robinson, since he criticized Kendi's speech to CMS despite admitting that he has not read Kendi's work or watched the videos.

This statement also exposes NC republican politicians' fear of the unknown and rejection of complex topics that shed light on oppressive structures sustaining pressing societal issues. This idea is further clarified in a statement that ridicules FACTS:

I am aware of teachers talking about race and racism in schools. This goes against my beliefs as a Christian and what is taught in the Bible. I know that DPI is currently a Christian organization under the helm of grandmaster Truitt, blessed be her name. We also honor Mark Robinson, for teaching a new generation of racist and bigots how to be new-racists. The new-racism he preaches and teaches makes it safe to be a racist conservative again. We also support the ban on CRT, even though we don't know what it is and it isn't being taught in schools...Thank you for censoring our teachers. We need bodycams and conservative classroom observers in every classroom.

Counterstories referencing the anti-intellectual movement of conservative politicians in NC also elicited the importance of teaching non-romanticized history in K-12 schools. These ideas are present in messages such as “We are not politicians, we are educators. There is no indoctrination in truth, there is no indoctrination in FACTS, and there is no extra time in a teacher's schedule to plot indoctrination.” The underscoring of sharing knowledge excluded from the contemporary discourse in the K-12 curriculum is also pressed for in statements like “There is no issue. If you don't know history, then you may want to try learning it. Understand that by learning it doesn't mean it's all going to be pretty.” These statements display encountering information that deviates from hegemonic perspectives. Potential implications of engaging new knowledge included gaining expansive understanding and navigating tensions from learning knowledge that counters dominant ideologies.

More specifically, counterstories highlighted the importance and necessity of education to challenge ahistorical understandings, as noted below:

Thanks for your work on this racist task force and for reminding us why we need to work harder in public schools to prevent people from growing up and becoming as biased, racist, and gullible as yourselves. I want my students to learn to actually think about things, rather than doing what you all do by blindly believing anti-history nonsense by political operatives.

This message also elucidates the role of educators as contributors to developing students' critical thinking to refine their own world views. Others boldly stated this commitment:

I have strong concerns about the efforts of certain leaders to limit the knowledge of our children. In the introduction to this form, it states “the purpose is to hold public schools accountable...by exposing indoctrination in the classroom and ensuring that our students are taught how to think—not what to think.” How can our students be taught HOW to think when people/leaders within our state are attempting to limit the facts that they need in order to use critical thinking skills and draw conclusions?

Summatively, the counterstories emerge alongside claims for indoctrination, statements against CRT, and demands to sustain a conservative agenda through K-12 education. However, the counterstories unsettled hegemonic ideologies by advocating for truth-telling, historicity, and the dissemination of knowledge traditionally excluded from public education. Counterstories also evidence the deep commitment of some NC educators toward social transformation by equipping students with a critical lens to examine societal ills.

Discussion

This CDA-oriented investigation examined a southern state's (NC's) ideologies that reproduce racialization/racism and the presence of counterstories advancing racial justice-oriented education. Findings arise from a so-called anti-indoctrination reporting tool led by elected officials steeped in the conservative agenda. Our analysis of FACTS submissions demonstrated four themes: 1) conservative agenda, including 2) ideologies of race/ism and 3) effects on education;

finally, 4) counterstories demonstrate challenges to these dominant racial ideologies through critical thinking and support for race conscious, historicized education.

Findings evidenced a conservative agenda underscored values rooted in Christianity and conservative politics framed as non-partisan education. Related to Christianity, reporting parties asserted tension between curricular features that they believed to be in contradiction with their Christian values. Specifically, the curricular components that reporting parties expressed rejection of include curricular topics related to white privilege and racial injustice, which they believed to misalign with Christianity's commitment to race evasive ideology and romanticized notions of racial equality.

These ideologies echo anti-intellectual convictions in the south (Camargo et al., 2021; Ramos et al., 2022; Whitaker et al., 2018). Precisely, the southern epistemology in these data emerges as reporting parties express disagreement with discussions at school that might disrupt their idealized view of a world in which white privilege and whiteness (Harris, 1993) do not exist. The southern epistemology is deployed to disparage educational criticality and maintain the status quo. Reporting parties did not state anti-intellectualism explicitly yet argued that critical topics in education were misaligned with their Christian values, which in this study, echoed whiteness and white supremacy as the norm in education (Crenshaw et al., 2000; Harris, 1993).

These ideas elucidate contemporary manifestations of Christianity as a tool for domination (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wilder, 2014) begun during U.S. statehood development and extended to strong influences in public education. Furthermore, and connected to effects of hegemonic ideologies on education, a conservative agenda pursues so-called non-partisan educational curricula but, by virtue of centering neutrality, sustains conservative knowledge and ways of knowing (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This dynamic was clearly present in submissions that demanded teachers not engage students with so-called left-leaning and assumed as misleading texts. This is yet another reverberation of taskforce supporters' commitment to perpetuate ahistorical whitewashed curricula in NC public K-12 education.

Findings also demonstrated pervasive beliefs in whiteness and white supremacy which revealed respondents' ideology of race/racialization/racism, for example, in demands to eradicate Black History Month. Through the conservative agenda, participants called for *maintaining* dehistoricized, whitewashed public education, especially regarding topics of slavery and ongoing racialized oppression. Historicized, these demands parallel the nationalist, racist permutations of immigration policy, construed along shifting perceptions of (proximity to) whiteness (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021; Ong, 1996). The findings betrayed respondents' beliefs rooted in notions of whiteness as dominant (Gutierrez, 2006) and evidenced the perceived threat to the superior valuation of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) through accurately conveying the historical and contemporary racialized experiences of People of Color. Specifically, the data displayed conservative movements to evade race (Harris, 1993) and, if unsuccessful, to more forcefully prioritize whiteness. Throughout the data, conservative agenda adherents espoused a racialized ideology that valorized whiteness, its unearned privileges (Harris, 1993), and, correspondingly, demonized and sought to dominate People of Color. Conservatives perceived historicized, race-conscious education as a form of theft, diminishing the superiority of whiteness; this ill-founded belief directly corresponded with reliance of white supremacy upon racial subordination (Gutierrez, 2006) and evading the reality of racism (Crenshaw et al., 2000).

The ideological effects of the conservative agenda on education represented attempts to police and control educators and the noncommittal move to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012) of white flight. Findings exhibited demands to sustain the conservative agenda and resist antiracism

in schools through deployments of white innocence (Gutierrez, 2006) in attempts to perpetuate conservative ideological instruction.

Calls for fundamental Christianity, ahistorical, and whitewashed curricular components demonstrated assumptions of white innocence and condoned racial oppression by proxy of side-stepping complicity. Expectations of white innocence (Gutierrez, 2006), an unearned privilege of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), resulted in conservatives' fear, discomfort, and shock when confronted by race-conscious education. Conservative adherents—to preserve whiteness—resorted to demands for upholding the subjectivity of whiteness to "preserve racial subordination" (Gutierrez, 2006, p. 26). Maintenance of white supremacy was displayed as opting-out of assignments (Haviland, 2008) disagreeable to the conservative agenda. When unsuccessful in maintaining white supremacy-as-property (Harris, 1993), conservatives relied upon white flight from public education (Donner, 2021; Zhang, 2009), a contemporary expression of educational segregation (Bondi, 2012), and demonstrated the fear-based motives of whiteness. Threatened by displacement at the top of the racial hierarchy, conservatives' claims of liberal indoctrination resulted in opting-out of "politicized" assignments or, in its most severe form, departure from public education.

Furthermore, our findings revealed a growing number of submissions representing counterstories, some believed to be from teachers serving NC schools per their intent to ridicule the taskforce. These counterstories conveyed messages that disrupted the taskforce's framing of educators as indoctrinators and expressed support for racial justice oriented education. Precisely, counterstories focused on two issues, the importance of critical thinking and the inclusion of knowledge that counters traditional curricular components. Some counterstories ridiculed the taskforce's purpose by powerfully countering hegemonic discourse, which reflected purposes and transformational impacts of counterstories (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Through counterstories, NC educators were empowered as legitimate knowers to narrate their own realities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Beyond amplifying the narratives of teachers and serving to disrupt stock narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) constructed by elected officials, counterstories documented the urge for public education to equip students with knowledge and tools, grounded in historicity, to expand their worldviews. Counterstories also demonstrated educators' agency, positioning as disruptors, and commitments to education for transformation within the conservative sociopolitical context of NC. The conceptual mapping that grounded this inquiry in the origins of racialized oppression, foregrounded the enmeshment of ongoing racism and its concomitant effects on educational spaces. Achieving racially-equitable public education requires undoing the twisted interconnectedness between racialized ideologies of white supremacy and racial subordination.

Implications

Our findings indicate the need to problematize the contexts within which critical scholarship resides. Specifically, counterstories present in submissions reflected powerful messaging and commitments to disrupting the status quo, however, the ideas evidenced a disconnect with contemporary critical scholarship that helps support these efforts. This is not to say that distancing from the critical scholarly discourse is a flaw of counterstories, our argument is that keeping critical scholarship within the confines of the academy limits its capacity for transformation. Accordingly, we invite critical scholars to disrupt academic elitism in the academy, especially the academy's control over knowledge production and sharing of knowledge to disrupt whiteness and white supremacy.

In NC in particular, calls to maintain and sustain “traditional” curricula evidenced the over-representation of conservatism already present in schools. In response and to advance critical race perspectives, a corollary implication is the necessity of assessing existing curricula for the present level of ideological foundations.

Critical educators need to know to what extent textbooks, standards, assessments, and curricular guideposts uphold conservatism and ahistorical perspectives. This knowledge will empower educators’ awareness of modules and lessons that require updating to account for historicized, justice-oriented pedagogy. A related implication is the need for updated textbooks and curricular materials that account for counter-stories that center race-consciousness and justice orientations.

Our findings also expressed urgency for the expanded understanding of CRT and its capacity for shaping education for transformation and racial justice. Pointedly, submissions underscored the mobilization of critical curricula in the classroom, yet denied it to be an illustration of a CRT-informed approach to knowledge production and sharing. Accordingly, we encourage education stakeholders to invest in efforts that support educators to more deeply understand CRT, its principles, and possibilities for shaping critical education. Despite conservative hysteria, Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw et al., 2000) is not a villain.

Conclusion

Altogether, CRT as a conceptual orientation in the present inquiry shed light on key ideologies that reproduce racism and racialization in NC and highlighted messaging of a commitment to transformation and racial justice present in educators’ counterstories. Primarily, this contemporary examination of politicization in a southern state upheld the reality of persistent ideologies of race and racism (Crenshaw et al., 2000) and the transformative capacity of counterstories (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Furthermore, the context of interest demonstrated reproduction of racialized ideologies in public education, evidenced through residents’ demands for continuing de-raced, de-historicized education. This demonstrated the CRT tenet of the social constructedness of race (Crenshaw et al., 2000); importantly, social construction conveys racialized ideologies’ permeability to change and transformation—they are not constant, intractable.

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Appendix: FACTS Documents

F.A.C.T.S Task Force: Fairness and Accountability in the Classroom for Teachers and Students

Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson is seeking to provide support for parents, teachers, and most importantly, students who are willing to stand up for North Carolina's future by exposing indoctrination in the classroom and ensuring that our students are taught how to think - not what to think. The Office of the Lieutenant Governor is establishing a Task Force (FACTS) to monitor the state of affairs within North Carolina classrooms. The primary goal of this task force is to allow the voices of concerned citizens to be heard regarding public K-12 education in North Carolina.

The FACTS Task Force advisory board is composed of education professionals representing all levels of K-12 including teachers, administrators, and university professors.

Purpose of the Task Force.

- To assist in holding local and county-level education officials accountable for what occurs in their schools;
- To provide a safe and secure setting where education professionals can transmit concerns regarding their school without fear of retaliation;
- To provide a central state-wide mechanism for gathering and sharing data related to parent concerns regarding public education, and to provide a mechanism for elevating awareness of concerns so that they can be addressed;
- To provide underrepresented parents and students a voice and an open line of communication with professional educator advocates for student experiences and outcomes;
- To assist concerned parents in navigating the bureaucracy within our public school system.

The FACTS Task Force is requesting that parents and teachers in North Carolina help us hold the system accountable. The Lieutenant Governor's Office is asking that you submit anything that meets the criteria listed below:

What to submit:

- Examples of discrimination or harassment related to a student's faith, ethnicity, worldview, or political beliefs;
- Examples of unequal, inconsistent, or disparate treatment of students in the enforcement of school rules and/or in disciplinary matters;
- Examples of students being subjected to indoctrination according to a political agenda or ideology, whether through assigned work, teacher comments, or a hostile classroom environment;
- Examples of students being required to disclose details regarding their individual race/ethnicity, sexual preference, religious ideology, or economic status
- Examples of students being exposed to inappropriate content or subject matter in the classroom, including matters relating to substance abuse, profanity, or of a sexual nature.

F.A.C.T.S. SUBMISSION FORM

First Name

Last Name

County

Email

Phone

Address

Address 2

City/Town

State/Province

ZIP/Postal Code

DATE OF INCIDENT



If ongoing, leave blank

DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE

Please tell us in as much detail as you can what the problem is, the parties involved, whether or not the issue is ongoing, and what steps have been taken to resolve the problem.