

# Hysteria, Hypermania, & Hullabaloo: How White Emotionalities Manufactures Fear of Critical Race Theory & Teaching: Part Deux—The Saga Continues

Cheryl E. Matias, PhD<sup>1</sup>

## ***Abstract***

*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 (Matias, 2022, p. 5).*

**Keywords:** critical race theory, whiteness, race, antiracism, teaching, education

## **Introduction: The Hullabaloo of it All**

Though written a couple years prior to this particular special issue publication, the words, concepts, and call-ins are still apropos for today (see Matias, 2022). For even if the CRT frenzy has died down a bit, it still wreaks of unresolved white emotionalities, insecurely projected onto those who have no issues with race (except for racism). Take for example a recent encounter I had with a local California K-12 school principal. Upon my daughter's acceptance into a gifted magnet school, I called the principal to hear more about the program, school, and curriculum. On the phone conversation the principal confidently talked about the gifted and talented curriculum, priding himself on test scores, community, and the talents of the students. In response I asked about whether the school engages in culturally responsive teaching and/or multicultural practices, however, before I could finish the question the principal interrupted me and (almost neurotically) blurted out, "We don't do CRT!" I took a breath and in my calm professor, critical race theorist voice, I responded with, "I did not ask if you do CRT. I asked about culturally responsive teaching which is not the same as CRT. I know because I am a professor of race who does teach CRT to

---

1. Corresponding author: Cheryl Matias, University of San Diego: [cmatias@sandiego.edu](mailto:cmatias@sandiego.edu)

doctoral students.” He stumbled over his words, trying to both backtrack his behavior whilst glossing over his obvious anxiety.

The confidence once exuded in our conversation was diminished. Who knows why? He could’ve been a supporter of racial justice in schools and feared helicopter parents who do nothing but hover over teachers. He could’ve not known a thing about race and was so fearful he just blurted out the first thing in his mind to stop the racial angst he was experiencing by merely bringing up the topic of culture. He could’ve been intimidated by me—rightfully so. The point is the mere question about culturally responsive teaching now ferrets out unresolved racial anxieties so unnecessarily produced because of the anti-CRT hullabaloo. Regardless to what camp one resides, it has produced within us all an unnecessary angst that erodes the confidence, professionalism, and trust in our educators. Is this what we, as a society, want for our educational system?

Furthermore, all of this stems from unfounded hysteria, or more poignantly, hullabaloo. Hullabaloo more precisely captures what this anti-CRT frenzy was all about because, as so defined, hullabaloo is an unnecessary commotion or fuss that when applied to the anti-CRT commotion only derailed the confidence of our educators, fixated on issues not even pertinent to education, and quite literally emotionally drained us to a point of fatigue. Teachers are leaving the classroom in droves. Parents are unnecessarily in a panic for something they know not of. And, most of all, students are straight confused instead of educated. Frankly speaking, this is the extreme opposite of what I want for education as a teacher education and race researcher. Instead of that crazy making, we, as a society, should want education to be about clarity and direction that builds a sense of confidence in our developing knowledge set; not manic hysteria. Yet, in looking at the knee jerk emotional reactions, illogical and irrational discourse patterns, and decisions post anti-CRT hullabaloo, blind hysteria is exactly what is happening to our educational system. So then, why is it that we, as discerning, rational adults, act in illogical, irrational, hysteric ways when it comes to race? Per Gonzalves (2008), teachers entrenched in racist ideology act with blind hysteria when merely engaging the topic of multiculturalism. In fact, he concludes with “if the function of graduate training is to replicate the pathology of denial and resistance, then it should be the priority of progressive academics to provide the antidote of critical consciousness at every opportunity” (p. 24-25). Though Gonzalves refers to graduate education, the same logic can apply to K-12 education. Is the function of K-12 education to replicate a pathology of dumbfuckery, illogical emotional behaviors, and a learnt resistance to discernment, rationality, and the human capacity to learn before engaging in knee jerk reactions? If this is the goal of the anti-CRT hullabaloo, then it is doing a grotesquely awesome job. The antidote for this anti-education then, like Gonsalves states, is for critical scholars to recommit to the betterment of society by reminding humanity of its humanly ability to critically reason; lest become nothing more than animals in heat unable to engage in rational thought.

### **In this Issue**

In this special issue journal, commonly nicknamed “Part Deux-The Saga Continues,” I present six articles that excavate the treacherous terrain of the anti-CRT hullabaloo. Essentially, these manuscripts answer the overarching inquiry of how do we make sense of the Anti-CRT bans and what is its aftermath. We begin the special issues with Bennett and Ramos’s “Troubling Hegemonic Racialized Ideologies in Education with Critical Race Theory.” In it they detail the ideologies that ferreted out during the height of the anti-CRT bans and reveal how such ideologies align to dominant ideas of race that are oftentimes racist. The second article by Cordero-Siy,

Lolkus, & Harper is “Whiteness and Fear: Backlash to Mathematics Education Reforms.” There, they dig deeper into one of those racialized ideologies—whiteness—and how the white emotionality (see Matias, 2016) of fear has led to unforeseen backlashes inside mathematics education. The third article “What do bans on CRT in education mean for Native education? Two teacher educators share their counterstories” is written by Benally and Anthony-Stevens. In the wake of the anti-CRT bans they document its deleterious impacts on Native education. The fourth article by Cabral, Parks, and Wells, is ““It’s Just Good Teaching”: Black Educators Respond to the So-called “Anti-Critical Race Theory” Backlash in K-12 Schools.” There, they document how Black educators fight back on the anti-CRT hullabaloo in K-12 schools, especially when the anti-CRT bans unjustly called to remove any mentioning of racism, race, and the experiences of Black Americans completely. The fifth article is by Jordan, Piontak, Treco, & McKoy entitled, “Enwhitened spaces: A critical race/critical whiteness content analysis of whiteness, disinformation, and Amazon reviews” and does a unique study on Amazon reviews of books that came out in response to the misunderstandings of CRT and race so evidence in the anti-CRT hullabaloo. There, they reveal the common misguided ideologies that go hand in hand with the crazymaking of that movement. Finally, we end with Locke and Blankenship-Knox’s ““A Bunch of Liberal, Nazi Communists”: Equity-Oriented Educational Leaders’ Response to the Anti-CRT Phenomenon in Iowa.” In this piece the authors take us into the state of Iowa giving us a concrete case study of how one state responded to the Anti-CRT hullabaloo whilst also documenting the resistance to it.

In each of these articles the authors take the reader deeper into the ideas behind the anti-CRT hullabaloo and how those embedded racist ideologies infected various subfields in education such that education has now become the anti-education. Yet, instead of taking it lying down, the authors resist. Their work is a testimony, so to speak, of their battles, triumphs, and regardless of the outcome, the ever-present struggle for educational justice. This, in and of itself, is what founding father of critical race theory Derrick Bell (1992) himself so argued in his parable “Afrolantica.” That it is not so much that we, as a humanity, should fixate on a false hope for a land without racism because racism is endemic. Instead, he suggests we should honor how humanity struggles through it together. Indeed, our collective struggle *is* our Afrolantica: our home, our peace, our hope. Meaning, though *eracism* (erasing racism) can be a lofty goal to ascribe to, the lack of its fruition should not be where our hope resides. Instead, hope must reside in bearing witness to humanity as we fight this injustice together. In essence, these articles are a testament to the hope and humanity Bell so instructs us to never overlook.

### **Conclusion: Shouldering the Cross of Shared Burden**

In a recent faculty meeting one of my colleagues, Dr. Niki Elliott, a leader in neurodiversity and equity, led the faculty in a breathing exercise to calm our vagus nerve—the nerve that controls most of our body. During the activity she educated us on the science behind how living in fight or flight mode for prolonged periods of time quite literally unnerves our nerves to a point where we are unable to make rational decisions and/or controlled actions. In those uncontrollable states, we lose ourselves. *Indubitably*, this entire anti-CRT hullabaloo with its unnecessary hysteria, drama, and anxiety has left K-12 teachers, all educators, and parents in a state of heightened emotional duress, causing a similar situation of fight or flight. This is the emotional context that could have possibly led that principal, aforementioned above, to almost unconsciously blurt out, “We don’t do CRT!” Out the door was the calm, collected, and educated principal and substituting in his place was a hot mess of panic. No one needs this saga to continue unless one really loves drama,

panic, and a state of unrest. In order to move away from the anxiety-inducing white emotionalities that undergird the anti-CRT hullabaloo, we must, like any good advice of any therapist, put boundaries on those which do not serve us in healthy ways. For topics on race and racism, it is necessary to “just say no” to knee jerk emotional ideologies that induce panic and hysteria around race. Instead, since fear is the devil, perhaps it is time we lean into our fears and begin to learn about race and racism instead of avoiding it; for succumbing to our fears is nothing but a pathetic attempt to avoid the shared responsibility of shouldering the cross of humanity.

### **Special Note**

To those I love (crispy bacon, kumbal, and La Dona), thank you for inspiring me to write with fierce love and always with faith.

### **References**

- Gonsalves, R. E. (2008). Chapter one: Hysterical blindness and the ideology of denial: Preservice teachers' resistance to multicultural education. *Counterpoints*, 319, 3-27.
- Matias, C. E. (2016). *Feeling White*. Brill.