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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. Tapp<sup>1</sup>

## 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*

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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)<sup>2</sup>

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.

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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 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

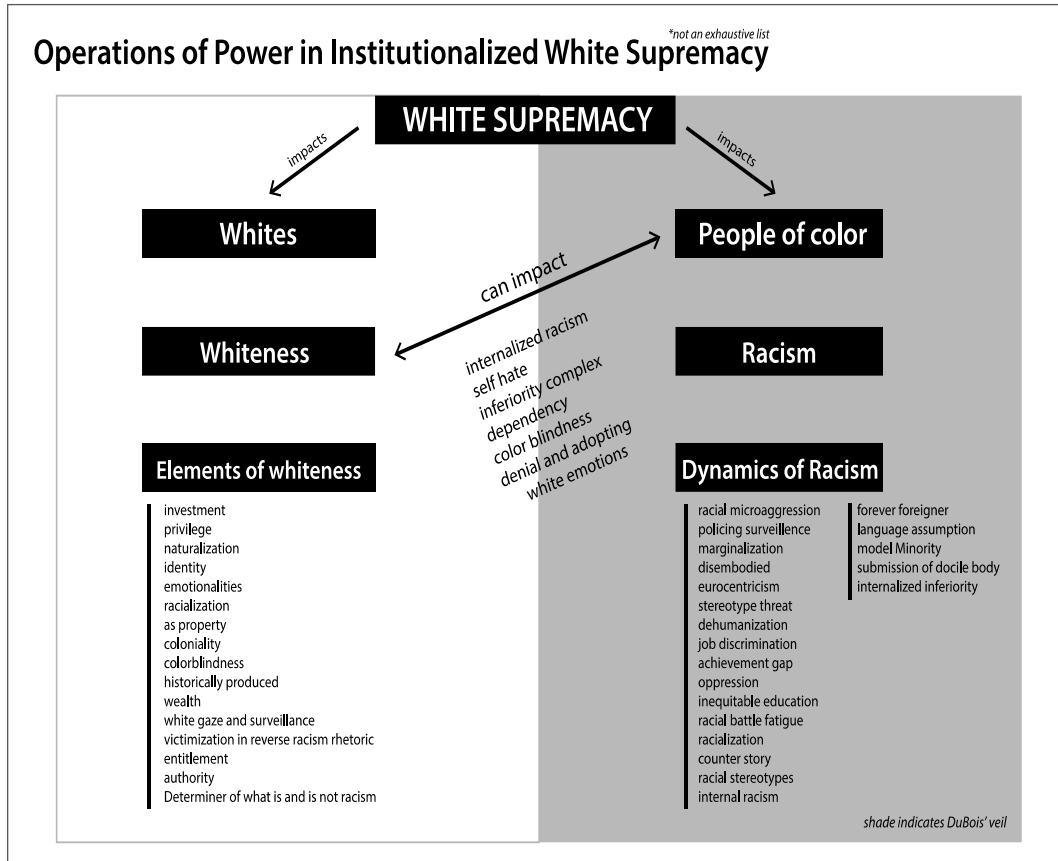
Is CRT being taught in schools? If it were, why did I have to wait to get my Ph.D. at UCLA to study it? I could have learned it in schools, or my three children could have learned it in schools.

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 psychosocial 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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