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### **Final Paper**

In a disturbing CRT bill-signing press conference on April 22nd 2022, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis found himself the center of a largely debated and controversial decision surrounding Critical Race Theory (CRT) in public education. Against a backdrop of national discourse and local concerns, the press conference gathered stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, with the common goal of supporting DeSantis. Known for his firm stance on educational policy, DeSantis faced the daunting task of balancing the demands of constituents while navigating the complexities of the educational curriculum. Governor DeSantis, known for his unwavering conservative principles, articulated his concerns about CRT's potential impact on young minds, emphasizing the need to preserve traditional educational values and avoid what he termed as "indoctrination." The bill he signed was called "Stop Woke Act" (stop wrong to our kids and employees act) and went into effect July 1st, 2022. The bill-signing press conference served as a microcosm of the broader national conversation, with voices advocating specifically against the incorporation of CRT into Florida's public educational system. Advocates emphasized the importance of acknowledging historical truths and equipping students with the tools to confront present-day inequalities. Conversely, critics cautioned against what they perceived as ideological indoctrination and urged for a curriculum centered on unity and American exceptionalism.

For Governor DeSantis, the challenge was double-sided, maintaining commitment to his hardcore conservative principles while addressing the legitimate concerns of educators, parents, and students. Aware of the polarizing nature of the issue, he showed blatant ignorance towards CRT and completely avoided the importance of a balanced approach to curriculum development. DeSantis proposed alternatives that emphasized civic education and the celebration of American values, in a way that hides some historical truths. The bill-signing press conference served as a platform for DeSantis to outline his vision for education in the state, emphasizing a curriculum that emphasizes traditional American values and history. The deliberations in this meeting captured the larger national discourse on the role of education in shaping societal narratives and values, reflecting the ongoing struggle to strike a balance between acknowledging historical injustices and fostering a unified national identity.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a framework within legal studies to examine the intersection of race, law, and power dynamics in American society and has since expanded into various disciplines, particularly public education. Initially developed primarily by scholars of color such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Alan Freeman, CRT aimed to focus on racial consciousness to address the question of “color” in American law (Minda 167). The roots of CRT can be traced back to critical legal studies and civil rights movements, which highlighted the inadequacy of formal legal equality in addressing racial injustice. In short, “CRT argues that disparity resources in black societies are sustained by white hegemony (Brooks 90). CRT scholars challenged the notion of color-blindness and argue that racism is ingrained in social structures and institutions, shaping law and policy in ways that perpetuate racial hierarchy and oppression. Critical race theory argues that this way of thinking has the ideological consequence of convincing minorities that racial discrimination can only be

eradicated through the implementation of color-blind meritocratic standards, which accord whites and blacks the same formal rights and process (Minda 168). One key tenet of CRT is the recognition that racism is not just individual prejudice or bias, but rather embedded within the fabric of society through laws, policies, and institutions. The embedded principles create “disparate resources that are sustained by society’s structures—economic, educational, political, and so on” (Brooks 90). Central to CRT is the concept of “interest convergence,” which suggests that advances in civil rights are only made when they align with the interests of those in power. This idea underscores the strategic nature of racial progress and the ongoing struggle for racial justice. Furthermore, CRT emphasizes the intersectionality of race with other social identities such as gender, class, and sexuality, recognizing that individuals experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. By examining these intersecting axes of identity, CRT provides a more nuanced understanding of how systems of power operate and intersect to shape people’s lives. One of the central concepts in CRT is the ‘interest-convergence principle’; put simply, this view argues that advances in race equality only come about when White elites see the changes as in their own interests (Bell, 1980). CRT’s insights can also be directly applied to education in terms of the application of standards and disciplinary measures in the school setting. Although still rarely used in educational paradigms, and banned in others, “CRT provides space in which to observe the workings of racism through close attention to stories” (Stovall 201). Critics of CRT argue that it promotes divisiveness and perpetuates a victim mentality by focusing too much on race. Lynn argues that urban schools are not “created with the intent of being spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually emancipating” (Lynn 1999, p. 607). Instead, they are promoted and utilized as a system of order and control” (Stovall 209).

However, proponents argue that CRT offers a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the enduring legacy of racism in society. By centering the experiences of marginalized groups and interrogating the ways in which power operates along racial lines, CRT encourages a more comprehensive analysis of social phenomena. Moreover, CRT provides a toolkit for challenging and dismantling systems of oppression, advocating for transformative change at both the individual and institutional levels. In recent years, CRT has sparked heated debates on various platforms, including education, politics, and media. Some states have sought to ban its teaching in schools, some have successfully banned its teaching in schools, while others have embraced it as a necessary tool for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. These debates reflect broader systemic tensions around issues of race, power, and representation in our society. As CRT continues to influence scholarly discourse and social activism, its impact on public policy and social justice movements remains a subject of ongoing debate and exploration. Regardless of anyone's stance on these debates, CRT serves as a provoking and illuminating lens through which to examine the complexities of race and racism in contemporary society.

Public education in the United States has a rich and complex history that reflects the evolving values, needs, and challenges of the nation. The roots of public education can be traced back to colonial times when education was primarily provided by private tutors or religious institutions. However, widespread public education did not become a reality until the 19th century with the rise of the common school movement. Spearheaded by reformers such as Horace Mann, Massachusetts secretary of board of education, the common school movement aimed to provide free, non-sectarian education to all children regardless of their background. This period saw the establishment of state-funded public schools and the adoption of compulsory attendance laws, laying the foundation for the modern public education system.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, public education underwent significant expansion and reform. The Progressive Era brought about further reforms in education, including efforts to standardize curriculum, improve teacher training, and expand access to secondary education. The mid-20th century witnessed landmark Supreme Court decisions that reshaped the landscape of public education. The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954 declared racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional, marking a pivotal moment in the struggle for civil rights. Despite this legal victory, achieving desegregation remained a contentious and often protracted process, highlighting the deep-seated racial inequalities within the education system.

More recently, public education in the United States has faced numerous challenges, including funding disparities, standardized testing controversies, CRT bans, and debates over school choice and privatization. Efforts to address these issues have led to initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind Act and the Every Student Succeeds Act, which aim to hold schools accountable for student performance and promote equity in education. However, persistent achievement gaps along racial, socioeconomic, and geographic lines underscore the ongoing need for reform and investment in public education.

Born on September 14, 1978, in Jacksonville, Florida, DeSantis is a Republican known for his strong conservative stances on various issues, specifically critical race theory. Ron DeSantis, the Governor of Florida since 2019, emerged as a prominent figure in American politics, gaining national attention for his policies, controversies, leadership style, and ban of CRT in the public education system. DeSantis has also been a vocal critic of what he perceives as government overreach, particularly from the federal government. He has clashed with the Biden administration on issues such as immigration, vaccine mandates, and environmental regulations. His combative stance has endeared him to many conservatives but has also fueled controversy

and political divides. In addition to his policy decisions, DeSantis's political future has been the subject of much speculation. He is widely seen as a potential candidate for higher office, including president, which he has previously run for. His polarizing style and controversial positions could pose challenges in a national campaign. However, his close alignment with Trump and his ability to mobilize conservative voters makes him a significant figure within the Republican Party and boosted his views on CRT.

Donald Trump's political career has been marked by his unorthodox approach to governance, populist rhetoric, and ability to formulate a loyal base. As the 45th President of the United States, Trump disrupted traditional norms and reshaped the Republican Party in his image. His four year presidency was characterized by a mix of economic nationalism, conservative judicial appointments, and a confrontational style in both domestic and foreign policy. Throughout his presidency, Trump garnered significant support from conservative voters who felt disenfranchised by what they perceived as liberal elitism dominating cultural and academic institutions, with issues like CRT. Trump's approach to governance often involved blunt rhetoric and a confrontational style, which resonated strongly with his base. Trump relied heavily on cultivating personal relationships with key political figures, both within his own party and across the political spectrum. One of the people to emerge alongside Trump during his presidency was Ron DeSantis, the Governor of Florida. DeSantis, a former U.S. Representative, aligned himself closely with Trump's brand of politics and enjoyed Trump's vocal support during his gubernatorial campaign in 2018. The alignment between Trump and DeSantis can be traced back to their shared political ideology, which prioritizes issues such as immigration restriction, tax cuts, deregulation, tough-on-crime stance and the removal of CRT. DeSantis embraced

Trump's agenda wholeheartedly, echoing his language on issues like border security and the economy.

Once in office, DeSantis continued to align himself with Trump's policies and governing style. Trump's opposition to CRT was evident during his presidency, as his administration took steps to restrict federal funding for programs deemed to promote CRT ideologies. Trump framed his stance as a defense of American values and an effort to combat what he characterized as "radical indoctrination" in schools and government agencies. Similarly, Ron DeSantis has positioned himself as an antagonist of CRT within Florida. DeSantis has taken executive action to ban the teaching of CRT in public schools and has supported legislation to prohibit its implementation in state-sponsored programs. Like Trump, DeSantis has framed his opposition to CRT as a defense of academic integrity and a rejection of alienating identity politics. The alignment between Trump and DeSantis on CRT reflects their broader strategy of appealing to conservative ideologies by upholding traditional values and pushing back against racial progress in cultural and educational institutions. By taking a strong stand against CRT, both Trump and DeSantis aim to solidify their support among grassroots conservatives while positioning themselves as defenders of American values and unity. This alignment strengthens their political partnership and highlights their shared vision for the future of the Republican Party.

The roots of the African American experience trace back to the transatlantic slave trade, a brutal and dehumanizing system that forcibly displaced millions of Africans from their homeland to labor under oppressive conditions in the U.S.. Stripped of their freedom, identity, and dignity, enslaved Africans endured unimaginable suffering, but also displayed remarkable strength and resilience in the face of adversity. Through resistance, rebellion, and the preservation of cultural traditions, they asserted their humanity and laid the foundation for the struggle for freedom and

equality that would follow. The African American experience in the United States is deeply intertwined with the history of education, reflecting a complex narrative of struggle, resilience, and progress. From the earliest days of slavery to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond, education has been both a tool of oppression and a pathway to success for African Americans. During the slavery era, access to education for African Americans was severely restricted, as slave owners feared that education would instill a sense of freedom and autonomy among their enslaved labor force. The philosophy was “the negro needs to be taught that labor is his salvation, not books” (Liwack 102). Despite these barriers, some enslaved individuals sought out clandestine means of education, risking severe punishment to learn to read and write. Education thus became a symbol of resistance and resilience, as African Americans recognized its potential to challenge the status quo and advocate for their rights.

The end of the Civil War brought about significant changes to the trajectory of education for African Americans with the establishment of Freedmen's Bureau schools and the emergence of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). These institutions provided specific educational opportunities for newly freed individuals, laying the foundation for generations of African American scholars, educators, and leaders. However, the promise of educational equality remained in question as segregation laws and systemic racism continued to shape the educational landscape. The Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 marked a pivotal moment in the fight for educational equality, declaring segregation in public schools unconstitutional. This decision paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement, during which African Americans, alongside allies of all races, mobilized to dismantle institutionalized racism, desegregate, and demand equal access to quality education.



Despite these political victories, the struggle for educational equality continued, as African American students continue to face systemic barriers to academic success. Persistent achievement gaps, and unequal funding, disproportionately affect African American communities, perpetuating cycles of inequality and injustice. However, grassroots movements and advocacy efforts continue to push for systemic change, demanding reforms that address the root causes of educational inequity and promote inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments. CRT is one of the ways to address the reasons for inequality but there has been ongoing debates on its relevance in schools. By acknowledging the legacy of the past and actively working towards a more inclusive future, we can strive to create educational systems that empower all individuals to thrive and succeed, regardless of race or background.

### **Literature Review**

In recent years, the discourse surrounding Critical Race Theory (CRT) has ignited a fiery debate across the United States, particularly within the realm of education. This debate reached a boiling point with Governor Ron DeSantis decision to ban the teaching of CRT in Florida, a move echoed by several other states. The bill, aimed at prohibiting teachers from discussing controversial topics from the nation's past such as racism and the subjugation of people of color, reflects a broader societal tension regarding the acknowledgment and understanding of systemic inequalities.

At the forefront of this debate is the question of whether CRT, with its focus on examining how racism is ingrained within social structures and institutions, should be incorporated into educational curriculum. The fact that there is even a debate on whether an important part of American history should be taught in education raises some intricate questions.

My method of analysis is a rhetorical analysis on the polarizing opinions on CRT discourse being taught in public education. The CRT bill-signing press conference video on Facebook featuring Ron DeSantis provides a vivid snapshot of the dividing opinions surrounding this issue, in the comments section, which serves as a microcosm of the larger discourse. The passionately expressed difference of opinions raises questions on why there is tension to begin with. What are both sides saying, and what is the basis of their argument/stance?

The introduction of CRT into the educational curriculum has sparked contentious debates among policymakers, educators, and the broader community. While some argue for its importance in addressing systemic racism and promoting social justice, others perceive it as divisive or ideologically driven. CRT has been viewed as negative because of definitional theft by white people, suggesting that CRT has something to do with “theories of Black supremacy, false claims about history, and out-of-control wokeness (Teitelbaum 50). Understanding the motivations behind these differing perspectives is essential for navigating the complexities of the CRT debate and its implications for education.

Critical Race Theory offers a framework for understanding the pervasive nature of racism and its impact on society. CRT is an organized movement in “legal studies to approach problems of race from the unique perspective of African Americans” (Minda 167). By analyzing how race intersects with systems of power and privilege, CRT provides valuable insights into the structural inequalities that persist in areas such as education, employment, and criminal justice. Through this lens, educators can foster a more nuanced understanding of history and social dynamics, empowering students to critically engage with issues of race and injustice. The issue with this is that it challenges the existing power structures and hegemonic ideologies. My research questions for this analysis are why do people in alignment with whiteness feel empowered to remove vital

portions of American history? The three main values of American society are peace, liberty, and justice for all. How can future generations achieve that without understanding the history of our nation? Those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it.

Whiteness, as a social construct and strategic rhetoric, plays a central role in perpetuating systems of oppression and privilege. Whiteness is deeper than just skin color. Many scholars of whiteness propose, “we consider whiteness not in terms of color but as a way of thinking and seeing and as an embodiment of power and privilege” (McKibbin 100).

Defined by Armstrong, “white supremacy is a deeply embedded cultural imagination that assumes whiteness is the norm or the universal, and every white person benefits from it” (Armstrong 39). CRT challenges the notion of colorblindness and exposes the ways in which whiteness operates as a strategy in maintaining dominance over other groups. The quote by Toni Morrison, “American means white, everybody else has to hyphenate” highlights the power of whiteness. People who are white experience natural privilege, “whites are socially produced, maintained, and constructed as white” (Shome 366). By examining the role of whiteness in shaping societal norms and institutions, educators can illuminate the mechanisms through which inequality is perpetuated, fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. This will also help examine the ignorance of whiteness through their stance on CRT. Referring to Shome, “whiteness doesn’t like to name itself and always remains hidden” (367). For example there are poor whites and it can be argued that the existence of poor Whites is not only consistent with White supremacy, it is actually an essential part of the processes that sustain it” (Gillborn 6). Ignorance is what drives their intentions to ban the educational teaching of another group's history from the school system.

The recent efforts to ban CRT raise critical questions about the future of education and the broader implications for society. Proponents of the ban may argue that CRT promotes a divisive narrative or undermines traditional values, while opponents contend that it is essential for fostering critical thinking and addressing historical injustices. The removal of CRT from the educational curriculum could have far-reaching consequences, shaping not only how history is taught but also how future generations understand and confront issues of race and inequality. The debate over Critical Race Theory represents a pivotal moment in the ongoing struggle for racial justice and equity in education. Power is intertwined with control, “whites will always be at the top and blacks at the bottom.”(Brooks 90).

By examining the tensions surrounding CRT and its implications for the education system and society as a whole, we can gain deeper insights into the complexities of race, power, and privilege. As we navigate these contentious waters, it is essential to critically engage with diverse perspectives and recognize the stakes involved in shaping the future of education.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the late 20th century as a framework for understanding the intersection of race, law, and power in society. Critical race theorists can be understood as “insisting that the arrangement of resources in our society along racial lines, not unlike the arrangement of furniture in the story, is racist”(Brooks 90).

At its core, CRT seeks to analyze and challenge the ways in which systemic racism operates within legal and social structures. The relevance of the African American experience to CRT is profound, as it serves as a central focus and foundation for much of CRT scholarship and activism.

The African American experience is deeply intertwined with the development of CRT, as it provides a rich historical and contemporary context for examining the ways in which racism

operates on both individual and structural levels. From the institution of slavery to Jim Crow segregation to ongoing forms of systemic discrimination, African Americans have faced pervasive and enduring barriers to full citizenship and equality in the United States. Being black in America comes with invisibility in the realms of social justice. This invisibility "gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat" (Reichardt 465). CRT acknowledges that these injustices are not simply relics of the past but continue to shape the lived experiences of African Americans today. The African American experience highlights the importance of centering race in discussions of social inequality and justice. Drawing from Du Bois' double consciousness, "is it possible for black people to make progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights" (Shafer 453).

CRT emphasizes the significance of race as a social construct that has been used to justify and perpetuate systems of oppression and privilege. By foregrounding the experiences of African Americans, CRT challenges dominant narratives that minimize or ignore the role of race in shaping social, economic, and political outcomes. In doing so, CRT seeks to disrupt the illusion of a color-blind society and to promote a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which race intersects with other forms of identity and power.

The African American experience serves as a critical lens through which to examine the limitations of traditional legal and political frameworks in addressing systemic racism. CRT highlights the ways in which legal doctrines and institutions have often reinforced rather than remedied racial inequalities, from the enforcement of discriminatory laws to the unequal application of rights and protections. By foregrounding the perspectives and experiences of African Americans, CRT challenges mainstream legal scholarship to grapple with the

complexities of race and racism in the law and to develop more equitable and inclusive approaches to justice.

The relevance of the African American experience to CRT cannot be overstated. By centering the experiences of African Americans, CRT illuminates the ways in which racism operates within legal and social structures and offers a powerful framework for understanding and challenging systemic injustice. As CRT continues to evolve and inform scholarly and activist endeavors, it remains deeply rooted in the struggles and resilience of African Americans in the fight for racial justice and equality.

One key aspect of CRT is its exploration of whiteness and its implications within these systems. Whiteness, within the context of CRT, refers not just to the racial category of being white, but also to the socially constructed norms, privileges, and advantages that are afforded to individuals perceived as white within society. CRT scholars argue that these privileges are not simply individual advantages but are deeply ingrained within societal structures and institutions, perpetuating systemic inequality and injustice.

CRT scholars argue that whiteness operates as an invisible norm that shapes societal norms, values, and institutions, often to the detriment of non-white individuals. This is how whiteness operates as a strategic rhetoric. The analysis of whiteness is the concept of racialization, which refers to the process by which racial categories are created, maintained, and enforced. Whiteness, as the dominant racial category in many Western societies, is often presented as the standard against which other racial groups are measured. This normalization of whiteness perpetuates the marginalization and oppression of non-white individuals and communities. CRT examines how whiteness is constructed and maintained through various mechanisms, including law, culture, media, and education. For example, legal structures and

policies have historically reinforced and perpetuated white supremacy, from slavery and segregation to contemporary issues such as mass incarceration and racial profiling. Similarly, cultural representations in media often reinforce stereotypes and norms that privilege whiteness while marginalizing and ostracizing non-white individuals. In addition to its critique of whiteness, CRT also explores strategies for challenging and dismantling white supremacy and racial inequality. This includes advocating for policies that address systemic racism, promoting racial diversity and inclusion, and centering the voices and experiences of marginalized communities in efforts for social change. CRT offers a critical lens through which to analyze the role of whiteness in shaping societal structures and perpetuating racial inequality. By interrogating the ways in which whiteness operates within systems of power and privilege, CRT aims to challenge and dismantle racial hierarchies and work towards a more just and equitable society.

Colorblind racism refers to a contemporary form of racism that downplays or ignores the significance of race and racial discrimination in society. It operates under the assumption that acknowledging race or discussing racial issues perpetuates racism itself, and therefore advocates for a "colorblind" approach to race relations. However, this ideology overlooks the systemic inequalities and historical injustices that continue to affect marginalized communities, particularly people of color. Colorblind racism often manifests in statements such as "I don't see color" or "We're all just individuals," which dismiss the lived experiences of racial minorities and invalidate their struggles.

In the context of public education, colorblind racism intersects with Critical Race Theory (CRT) in significant ways. According to Bonilla-Silva, "color-blind racism is an ideology that acquired "cohesiveness and dominance in the late 1960s, and explains contemporary racial

inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics" (Martinez 587). While CRT seeks to uncover and challenge racial injustices, colorblind racism within the education system attempts to suppress discussions about race and inequality. This suppression can occur through policies and practices that prioritize "color blindness" in curriculum development, teacher training, and disciplinary actions. Colorblind rhetoric perpetuates the myth of meritocracy, suggesting that success and failure are solely determined by individual effort rather than systemic barriers rooted in race. However, "color-blind racism does not rely on such a simplistic argument but instead rationalizes the current social status of people of color as a product of "market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and minorities' self-imposed cultural limitations" (Bonilla Silva 2).

By avoiding conversations about race and systemic racism, educators may give the notion that perpetuates inequalities and reinforces existing power dynamics. By ignoring the role of race in shaping social outcomes, it ignores the ways in which racism operates in institutions and everyday interactions. This allows discriminatory practices to persist unchecked, as they are not acknowledged or addressed. Contemporary racial inequality is "reproduced through color-blind racist practices that are subtle, structural, and apparently nonracial (Martinez 588).

Color-blind racism undermines efforts to confront racial inequality, "not surprisingly, this view of society blind to color is not equally shared. Whites and blacks differ significantly"(Gallagher 23). The belief that race is irrelevant or that racism is a thing of the past can lead to resistance against policies and initiatives aimed at promoting racial equity. This can manifest in opposition to affirmative action programs, diversity initiatives, and other measures designed to address historical injustices and promote inclusivity.



Color-blind rhetoric can also limit the effectiveness of anti-racist education and advocacy efforts. By denying the significance of race, it hinders discussions about privilege, power dynamics, and the need for structural change. This can create a false sense of complacency and prevent meaningful dialogue about the ways in which racism continues to shape our society. In order to combat color-blind racism and advance the goals of CRT, it is essential to challenge the underlying assumptions and beliefs that sustain it.

Donald Trump's political rhetoric can be characterized as a blend of aggressive and conservative stances, which he employed throughout his presidency and continue to influence the political landscape. Trump's aggressive rhetoric often took the form of bombastic language, sharp criticism of opponents, and a willingness to challenge traditional norms of political discourse. Trump's violent speech is tactical, "violent speech emphasizes alienating differences between persons, social groups, or communities" (Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon 3).

One aspect of Trump's aggressive rhetoric was his tendency to use inflammatory language when discussing issues. This aggressive style resonated with many of his supporters who appreciated his willingness to "tell it like it is" and shake up the political establishment. In addition to his aggressive rhetoric, Trump's political stance can also be described as conservative, particularly on socio/political issues. Trump's conservative agenda was evident in his efforts to ban critical race theory in the education system.

The relevance of Trump's political rhetoric to Critical Race Theory (CRT) lies in its impact on Black people and racial dynamics in America. Trump's aggressive rhetoric often targeted marginalized communities, including Black Americans, through language that was racially charged or implicitly discriminatory. His statements regarding immigration, crime, and

social unrest often painted minority groups, including Black individuals, in a negative light, perpetuating stereotypes and exacerbating racial tensions. During the 2016 election Trump stated “the only important thing is unification of the people - because the other people don’t mean anything” (Brigitte L. Nacos, Robert Y. Shapiro, Yaeli Bloch-Elkon 2). Understanding the impact of Trump's rhetoric on racial dynamics is crucial for comprehending the challenges faced by Black communities and advancing the goals of Critical Race Theory.

## **Analysis**

In the digital age, political discourse transcends the traditional boundaries of televised debates proliferating on online platforms where individuals engage in discussions, share opinions, and scrutinize the actions of elected officials. One instance of this phenomenon is the Facebook video of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' bill signing press conference, which subsequently became a focal point for commentary and critique within the online community. This analysis delves into the dynamics of the press conference itself, examining Governor DeSantis' messaging, ideologies and the reactions it elicited from viewers. This analysis aims to delve into the intricacies of the Facebook video, specifically focusing on the dynamic interplay between the content of the press conference and the reactions it has evoked in the comments section. The comments section of online platforms has become a digital agora where diverse perspectives converge, clash, and intertwine. By examining the discourse within this space, we can gain valuable insights into the multifaceted reactions to DeSantis' actions, as well as the broader socio-political context in which they unfold.

The press conference, serves as the focal point of our analysis, provides a visual and auditory platform through which DeSantis communicates his stance and decision on CRT to the public. However, the significance of this issue extends beyond the immediate content of the press

conference itself. The comments section accompanying the video serves as a microcosm of public sentiment, offering a snapshot of the diverse range of opinions that shape the political discourse surrounding Critical Race Theory. This exploration is not intended to be a mere dissection of the video or a cataloging of comments; rather, it seeks to uncover patterns, themes, and nuances within the video that illuminate the broader implications of the political moment captured in the press conference. As we navigate through the video and comments section, we will analyze the varying tones, ideologies, and rhetorical strategies employed by participants to express their perspectives, creating a tapestry that reflects the complexity of discourse surrounding CRT in public education.

Watching the press conference would have you believe that CRT is the worst theory ever invented. Ron DeSantis facilitated the bill signing press conference but did not stand on stage alone. He was accompanied by a diverse group of about 50 people which is very tactical. Little kids should not be used as props for issues outside of their incompetence. One commenter said “using kids as props is disgusting”. Kids were on stage holding signs that had the word CRT crossed out on it. Not knowing what they were holding, the kids stood on stage dazed and confused. Some were rubbing their eyes and not even holding the sign with good posture, letting you know they did not want to be there. But Ron DeSantis brought upon every tactic he knew to articulate his arrogance towards CRT in public education. There was one little kid who was visibly disengaged from the press conference the entire time. He was yawning, swaying his body, wondering his eyes, and even playing under the table. His disengagement during the press conference is proof that little kids had no business being on the stage. DeSantis' use of children as props is quite disturbing. Those innocent kids had no idea what CRT meant or the significance of the press conference so having them up there is dirty work on his part.

As we know CRT is fully committed to the teaching of slavery and how it affects black people in our country. CRT scholars insist that “being in control, whites will be at the top and blacks at the bottom” (Brooks 90). An equal and just society is something most if not all black people would advocate for, meaning there’s something deeper going on here. CRT in short “argues that disparity in black society is sustained by white hegemony”(Brooks 90) which should unify black ideologies. But DeSantis conservative views and strategies challenge this notion of CRT.

The CRT that DeSantis and his party along with the Facebook commentators oppose in the press conference is totally different from the one scholars and people advocate for. Ron DeSantis, the Governor of Florida, and his supporters vehemently oppose Critical Race Theory (CRT), aligning with a broader conservative stance against what they perceive as divisive and harmful ideologies infiltrating education and public discourse. A disturbing aspect of the press conference is the visible comfort and calm demeanor of DeSantis. Before he even walks in, people are smiling in anticipation of his presence. Some even had their phones out to record him as he walked into the venue. Every single person in the room is visibly in agreement with DeSantis. Whenever he says something moving to the audience they nod their head or gesture their alliance with him. Whenever he says something that he deems as powerful he stops and pauses to give the audience a chance to clap for him. His confidence is through the roof because there is no threat present to his stance. The entire press conference is just an ignorant production to combat CRT and boost DeSantis ego. DeSantis, a prominent figure in the Republican Party, has been vocal about his stance on CRT, framing it as a threat to traditional American values and principles. His perspective, echoed by many of his supporters, reflects concerns about the potential impact of CRT on education, social cohesion, and national identity. His perspective on

CRT really had his followers believing that he was “protecting children from the evil wickedness of some teachers and administrators.”

The blatant ignorance of Christopher Rufo puts the conservative ideologies and viewpoints into perspective. Christopher Rufo is known to be the activist who initiated CRT attacks. According to an article by Teitelbaum he admitted that his strategy was to “make absurdly distorted claims about CRT in order to steadily drive up negative perceptions ...eventually turning it toxic”(Teitelbaum 50). This is the same man who was a spokesperson in the press conference. For such a little man, Rufo speaks with such passion against CRT and its purpose in education. His tone and demeanor is one of arrogance and confidence because he knows no matter what he says the entire crowd will back him up. Statements like “YOU need to abolish this program or there will be consequences” display Rufo's threatening demeanor.” His overt gestures and facial expressions compliment his ignorance and intent. His aggressive emphasis on words throughout his speech served as a threat to anyone opposed to his views as if he wanted you to challenge him. This is quite ironic considering the fact that everyone present is in favor of the banning which is already going into effect. DeSantis and his supporters (Rufo) view CRT as a divisive and ideologically driven framework that undermines the foundational principles of the United States. They argue that CRT promotes a narrative of systemic racism that portrays America as inherently oppressive and irredeemably flawed. For DeSantis and his crowd, this narrative is not only inaccurate but also detrimental to national unity and progress. Elated with DeSantis stance one commenter said “that’s my Governor, a true fighter for our freedom against leftist, Dems torture of our children!” They believe that focusing on past injustices and systemic issues detracts from individual responsibility and diminishes the accomplishments of American society.

Furthermore, DeSantis and his supporters are concerned about the influence of CRT in educational institutions, particularly in K-12 schools. They argue that exposing children to CRT concepts will foster resentment, guilt, and division among students based on race. Instead, they advocate for a curriculum that emphasizes American exceptionalism, celebrates the nation's achievements, and promotes unity rather than division. From their perspective, CRT represents a form of indoctrination rather than education, pushing a particular ideological agenda onto impressionable young minds. DeSantis and his crowd see this as a threat to academic freedom and intellectual diversity, advocating for a balanced approach to teaching history and social issues. They argue for a curriculum that acknowledges the complexities of American history while emphasizing patriotism and civic responsibility.

They accuse proponents of CRT of seeking to silence dissent and impose a monolithic worldview on society, labeling any opposition as racism or bigotry. For DeSantis, this represents a broader cultural and political battle against what he perceives as the forces of radical leftism, which he sees as antithetical to American values and principles. Ron DeSantis and his crowd view CRT as a divisive and ideologically driven framework that undermines American unity and progress. Some believe that it is leftist that in the comments they said “thank you for supporting families and having a backbone to stand up to the twisted ideology with no morals and values, stop the woke crazy. They oppose its teaching in schools and advocate for a curriculum that promotes patriotism, academic freedom, and intellectual diversity. The polarizing sides view CRT as two completely different ideologies, largely in part to their own ideologies. It is hard to formulate an agreement when two parties aren't in continuity on the subject matter at hand. The conservative ideologies of the DeSantis party are so prevalent that it makes it nearly impossible for them to have any understanding of what CRT truly stands for.

## **Conservative Ideologies (Whiteness)**

The press conference with Ron DeSantis and the comments perpetuate whiteness through several facets of the discourse and its framing. “Whites don't see their viewpoints as a matter of perspective. They see it as the truth” (Taylor 122). Firstly, in DeSantis' rhetoric and approach to the issue, there may be an underlying reinforcement of white hegemony. The blatant ignorance of how whiteness perpetuates is prevalent in the comments, “If you don't respect FL's Governor and Florida's way of doing things, DON'T move to Florida! We DO NOT want or need you.” By positioning CRT as a threat or an enemy to be combated, he amplifies the anxieties of white constituents who perceive any challenge to the status quo as a personal affront. This framing suggests that whiteness and its associated power structures are under attack, fostering a defensive posture among those who benefit from them. The composition of the press conference itself reflects the perpetuation of whiteness. Coining CRT as a form of “indoctrination” is beneficial for white individuals. Black people were brought to America for the purpose of slavery and seen as inferior to the white race, which is arguably the biggest stamp of indoctrination in American history. DeSantis said “what we will not do is let people distort history to try and serve their current ideology.” This comment is hypocritical because his party is the one trying to rewrite history in a way that benefits white Americans and hides the truth. CRT analyzes systemic issues within society and DeSantis refers to this as a “distortion” of American history. The panel consisted of predominantly white individuals, reinforcing the idea that discussions about race and racism are primarily the domain of white voices, sidelining perspectives from marginalized communities which explains comments like “funny you are supposedly for freedom and take away freedom from others by banning bookng and making it harder for the LGTBQ community. Freedom only seems to be for those you agree with.” This marginalization perpetuates the

dominance of whiteness within the conversation, as non-white perspectives are either tokenized or excluded altogether. The language used during the press conference can contribute to the perpetuation of whiteness. One commenter stated “you're doing it right, keep up the good work and thank you for your American Values. If freedom was truly an American value slavery and racism would have never existed in this country. Senator Simpson said “we must remember we are not responsible for sins of the past”, totally taking away the responsibility of acknowledging the best to make a more equitable future. When terms like "colorblindness" and "indoctrination" are employed without critical examination, it reflects a failure to acknowledge the ways in which whiteness operates as a social construct that confers privilege and advantage. By dismissing or downplaying the significance of race, these discourses uphold the status quo of white dominance by avoiding uncomfortable discussions about systemic inequalities. DeSantis says he wants the “curriculum to consist of stories that embody the principle of freedom.” The historical context of black people in America was not built on the principles of freedom. Therefore, it would be false advertisement to depict America in this way. In the CRT press conference with Ron DeSantis, the perpetuation of whiteness is evident through the framing of the issue, the composition of participants, the language used, and the proposed policies and actions. By examining these various aspects, it becomes apparent how discussions about race and racism can inadvertently reinforce existing power structures and privilege, thus perpetuating whiteness in society.

Another aspect of whiteness that DeSantis uses is the ideology of being “color blind.” The ideology of colorblindness perpetuates racism by ignoring the realities of racial disparities and systemic discrimination. According to Eduardo Silva, colorblind racism is the “idea that race is no longer a central factor determining the lives of Americans” (Silva 191). Colorblindness dismisses the significance of race and racial identities. By promoting the idea that one should be



"blind" to race, it suggests that acknowledging racial differences is unnecessary or even harmful. However, race plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' experiences and opportunities within society. Ignoring race overlooks the unique challenges and forms of discrimination faced by black people. The racial ideology, color-blind racism, has emerged as a central ideological mechanism for supporting and reproducing the new racial structure of the United States. Colorblindness fails to address systemic racism and inequalities. By refusing to acknowledge the existence of race-based disparities in areas such as education, employment, housing, and criminal justice, colorblind ideology hinders efforts to combat these injustices. Without recognizing the structural barriers that certain racial groups face, there can be no meaningful progress toward achieving equality which is the goal of whiteness. The primary function of color blindness is to “create a justification for the perpetuation of a racist social structure by placing responsibility for poverty and other societal issues on Blacks themselves” (Monnat 641). Color blindness is used as a tool to maintain the status quo and uphold existing power structures. By denying the significance of race, those in positions of privilege can avoid acknowledging their own advantages of taking responsibility for addressing inequality. This allows systemic racism to persist unchecked, perpetuating disparities and injustices.

### **Tokenism**

The black and brown kids and parents that stood on stage in favor of the banning of CRT are merely examples of tokenism. Having little black kids who are too incompetent to understand CRT stand on stage is quite disturbing. From commenter Jeff Lynne, “like the Governor, but using kids as props (do they even understand the signs they are holding) is really disgusting.” Defined by “Oxford Reference”, tokenism is “the promotion of disadvantaged groups to give the impression of equal opportunity.” In predominantly white spaces tokenism becomes even more

effective. This ultimately creates an illusion of diversity or inclusion without fundamentally challenging existing power structures or addressing systemic inequalities. In this scenario, people of color are valued primarily for their racial or ethnic background rather than their qualifications, skills, or expertise. They are expected to conform to stereotypical expectations and represent their entire racial or ethnic group, thereby reinforcing existing biases and limiting their agency. In an article by Lorraine Code, King is quoted, “tokenism has sufficed to appease the masses and prevent national revolt from people of color. If we are to have a truly integrated society, it will never develop through tokenism” (King 325) DeSantis' relationship between the people of color doesn't really seem authentic. The handshakes and forced hugs he shared with the black moms and officials reflected his broader agenda to use them as tokens for his press conference. He made sure to make the people of color comfortable so that they would further push his narrative on CRT. John Davis, a black man, was the only person DeSantis bragged on when introducing his featured guests. DeSantis made it known to the audience that Davis was a football player at Florida State University and was on full ride scholarship. Not only was it a way to get brownie points from Davis but it also was a subtle way of tokenism. It hinted at the idea that if Davis could get a full ride scholarship to higher education then certainly other black people can do so.

By placing individuals from marginalized groups in visible roles or positions, white-dominated ideologies can claim to be inclusive and progressive without addressing deeper issues of structural inequality or racism. It is argued by Lorraine Code that “tokenism is negatively evaluated because of its persistent association with individualistic conceptions of subjectivity” (Code 246). Ron DeSantis repeatedly says “everyone can succeed” and “don't let anyone say you can't” as the people of color stood behind him. He was symbolically saying that

because black people have equal opportunity”, no one should be supporting CRT as it lies about the ideology of our country. Tokenization aligns with docility as you aren’t supposed to challenge the status quo, rather accept things for what they are. Token members are generally “expected to make themselves "fit in," to conduct themselves according to the standards of the dominant group, and to avoid calling attention to their "difference"(Code 247). The few black people on stage served as a visual to the illusion of equal opportunity and the perception that all black people's stance should align with those on the stage. DeSantis ends his speech by saying “we are going to make sure everyone has a fair shot of living out their dream” just before the black parents and officials speak. John Davis, the secretary of Florida is the epitome of tokenization. He begins his speech bragging on his accomplishments and how he attended Florida State University on full scholarship. The crowd was in awe upon this discovery, as you could hear them clapping and some even saying “wow”. His accolades earned him extended praise from the audience. He explains in his speech about how he was a black kid from a small town who became extremely successful, only illuminating the strategy behind tokenism. As he reminisces on his upbringing and how it relates to the teaching of CRT, he believes that “CRT would have you believe that a black kid couldn’t or doesn’t have a fair chance to succeed.” Davis used his personal success to generalize the entire black community which plays into DeSantis' whole strategy. Using a black man to disregard the struggles blacks face just because he was a part of the small percentage that are fortunate enough to make it out, which is part of a larger strategic ideology, tokenism. John Davis concludes his speech by thanking the “great Governor of Florida” for his efforts and works. The likelihood of a black individual to be this outspokenly on board with conservative/white ideologies is rare which is why DeSantis cherishes them as tokens of his ignorance that so heavily persist.

## **Interest Divergence**

For white people, interest convergence makes them more inclined to support black people when they perceive it as beneficial to themselves or to the larger social order. It posits that “dominant groups will tolerate social change only if such change suits their interest” (Pelak 307). Understanding interest convergence is essential for white individuals because it highlights the complexities of racial dynamics and underscores the need to critically examine their own motivations and actions in the pursuit of racial justice. For the purpose of the CRT press conference, interest convergence is very present. It is rare for a black person to be so heavily involved at a predominantly white event/cause. They were given the stage because it provided white people an opportunity to hide their agenda in the racial sphere. Their shared beliefs with white ideologies made it easy for them to be incorporated.

Interest convergence is defined as the “interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of whites” (Bell 523). This encourages black bodies to align themselves with whiteness for societal acceptance. In other words, advancements in racial equality tend to occur only when they serve the interests of those in power. This concept sheds light on why black people find themselves participating in actions or movements that, on the surface, seem to benefit them, but in reality, serve to maintain or reinforce existing power structures. The parents and government officials in the CRT are prime examples. Interest divergence forces black people to seek validation from white people. John Davis sought approval for graduating college as he took a long pause to make sure the audience gave him a round of applause. He was trying his very hardest to fit in and align himself with the status quo. Interest convergence suggests that meaningful advancements in racial equality

typically occur when the interests of the oppressed group align with the dominant group in order to hide the racial equality in our country. In the context of CRT, this theory acknowledges that progress for Black people often occurs not solely out of a genuine desire for justice but rather when such progress also serves the interests of white society or those in positions of power. In the contemporary context, interest convergence continues to be relevant in understanding why Black people participate in various movements or initiatives that hinder them more than help them and the CRT banning press conferences is another example.

### **CRT Support**

Because all of the people in attendance were in favor of CRT being banned in public education it was hard to see the opposing perspective. The comments section to the Facebook video was the only place it was present. The one sided framework of CRT that DeSantis describes through the press conference is in total domination except within the comments section. (CRT) has garnered significant support from various individuals and groups, particularly in academic and social justice circles. CRT is a framework that seeks to understand and address systemic racism and inequality embedded within societal structures and institutions. Those who strongly support CRT often do so because they believe it offers valuable insights into the persistent racial disparities and injustices present in contemporary society. An ideological approach that supports CRT is the belief in the importance of acknowledging and confronting historical and ongoing racial injustices. CRT provides a lens through which to critically examine how power dynamics, historical legacies of slavery and colonialism, and institutional practices have contributed to the marginalization of certain racial groups which is very important. By recognizing and grappling with these realities, supporters of CRT assert that meaningful progress toward racial equity and justice can be achieved. Which is ultimately what our entire country,

regardless of race, should be fighting for. Ideologically, those who support CRT often align with progressive or liberal ideologies that prioritize social justice, equity, and inclusivity. Which is what leads to comments like “Maybe some of the Democrats would like him better if he were walking around lost like our President.” They see CRT as a tool for uncovering and dismantling the underlying mechanisms that perpetuate racial disparities instead of getting on board and fixing them.

Understanding how race intersects with other forms of oppression, such as class and gender, is crucial for addressing the complexities of inequality. By analyzing how power structures have historically marginalized certain racial groups, CRT seeks to challenge dominant narratives and advocate for policies that promote racial equity. This approach is aligned with ideologies that prioritize historical context, intersectionality, and the redistribution of resources to marginalized communities. Supporters of CRT emphasize the importance of lived experiences and storytelling as legitimate sources of knowledge about racism and oppression. Proponents argue that centering the voices of marginalized groups is essential for understanding the full extent of racial injustice and for crafting effective solutions. This emphasis on narrative and experiential knowledge resonates with ideologies that value diversity, multiculturalism, and the amplification of marginalized voices.

The clash between support for CRT and conservative ideologies stems from fundamental differences in how each side perceives the nature of racism and inequality, as well as divergent views on the role of government, institutions, and individual responsibility in addressing these issues. You have people who fully support the challenge of systemic racism and racial injustice and comment on FB in solidarity with CRT, “God help us from this man and his promotion of non-problems for his political benefit.” Though CRT is mainly about black people, the support

extends beyond that. It supports the teaching of history including the racist history of our country. Supporters of CRT would agree that if you truly support a fair and just society we must face the harsh realities of our country. Though the world has progressed tremendously since the times of slavery, racism still persists and CRT supporters remind us that we can not ignore it.

### **Conclusion**

Ron DeSantis and his party's blatant ignorance and understanding of our society's past and how it should be taught is quite disturbing to me and I could not disagree more. Trying to hide the dark secrets of our country's past by teaching it in a very surface level way is upsetting because it ignores issues that are still prevalent today. Banning CRT would overlook the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities, denying students the opportunity to engage with and learn from these voices. Education should empower students to confront and address issues of injustice rather than shy away from them. The way DeSantis twisted the entire CRT theory to align with his ideologies shows that we have a lot of work to do as a nation. For someone to be this ignorant but have so much support is something that should be further analyzed. Ron DeSantis banning CRT goes against everything he claims to support because how could you not stand for CRT which plays a vital role in promoting critical thinking, fostering inclusivity, and encouraging dialogue about social justice and equity in public education.