

Deno Terry

Dr. Bednar

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### **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 board meeting video on Facebook featuring Ron DeSantis provides a vivid snapshot of the dividing opinions surrounding this issue, as evidenced by 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.

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