

“THINK OF THE CHILDREN!”: UNDERSTANDING PARENTAL AND  
COMMUNITY OPPOSITION TO CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN SCHOOLS

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## ABSTRACT

### “THINK OF THE CHILDREN!”: UNDERSTANDING PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY OPPOSITION TO CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN SCHOOLS

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Critical Race Theory (CRT) in schools has become a controversial topic nationwide, leading to widespread and alarming bans on the teaching of CRT. CRT has been accused of shaming white children, creating racial division, and creating a “victim mentality” amongst people of color. The CRT utilized in critical legal studies, ethnic studies, and sociology looks drastically different from what opponents claimed. So, what exactly is CRT - more importantly, what do opponents of CRT believe it to be, and why are they opposed to it? This thesis builds on the sociological field of critical whiteness to examine the academic origin of Critical Race Theory and establishes the contextual background to the emergence of opposition to CRT. Utilizing qualitative semi-structured interviewing, thirteen people in rural Northwestern Washington are interviewed about their understanding and opinion of CRT taught in schools. These interviews identified the primary concern in opposition to CRT as concern for children, for white children and children of color. Opponents of CRT expressed concerns that white children would be shamed for their racial identity and made to feel guilty for the legacy of white supremacy. Opponents expressed concerns that children of color would be taught that they are victims and unable of achieving greater life outcomes if they learn about the history of oppression. Opponents of CRT commonly utilized a “colorblind” framework towards

racial relations, believing that the acknowledgement of racial differences and oppression would further perpetuate oppression, driving their opposition to CRT. The continual denial of systemic racism through this “colorblind” framework perpetuates the continuation of systemic racism. This research contributes to an emerging field in sociology and educational studies focused on addressing the concerning and rapidly developing implications of opposition to CRT. The in-depth qualitative interviews conducted in this thesis provide in depth insight to understand the opponents and opposition of Critical Race Theory.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Think of the children!” has become a common rhetorical argument against any issue that poses a potential threat to our youth. Protecting children is an often non-partisan and largely unifying issue that draws support from all communities. After all, who is opposed to the protection of children? For many, it is intuitive to protect our children from the world's dangers, both real and perceived. Since 2020, provoking calls to “think of the children” and “protect our kids” have drawn the attention of outraged parents, grandparents, and community members to a nationwide issue around a previously unknown term: Critical Race Theory.

Opponents claim Critical Race Theory has posed a major threat to our children, our communities, and our future. FOX News and conservative pundits have claimed CRT is immeasurably harmful to our children and is a tool of indoctrination for Marxist agendas. While concern for Critical Race Theory and its so-called agenda have mounted, many academics have expressed confusion over the sudden spike of interest and attention drawn to Critical Race Theory. Until 2020, the usage of the term “Critical Race Theory” was largely constricted to fields such as critical legal studies, ethnic studies, and sociology. The Critical Race Theory of academia looks dramatically different than the Critical Race Theory presented on Fox News. So, what is Critical Race Theory? More importantly, what do opponents of Critical Race Theory believe it to be, and what has motivated them to protect their children from it?

Thirteen participants from rural Northwestern Washington State were interviewed about their understanding and knowledge of Critical Race Theory, their core beliefs, and

their thoughts on race being taught in schools. Interview data indicated that respondents were largely motivated to oppose Critical Race Theory by their concern for children. Interviewees often believed their children were “racially neutral” and therefore incapable of racial bias. Children were often perceived to be “racially innocent” and not only devoid of racial bias but devoid of general racial awareness unless explicitly taught. This belief was perpetuated by the beliefs of interviewees that racism is an intentional, individual act taught through direct teachings of racism, as opposed to a systemic act of violence, that is often unconsciously replicated in structures and daily interactions. Interviewees often framed their beliefs of opposition to Critical Race Theory as rooted in their beliefs in racial “colorblindness” (later referred to in this paper by Sociologist Ruth Frankenberg’s term color and power evasiveness). Interviewees identified their beliefs around race to largely center around their belief in racial equality and equal opportunity for all, largely facilitated by a “colorblind” approach to race.

This paper utilizes open-ended, semi-structured qualitative interviewing to gain a deeper understanding of the opponents of Critical Race Theory, their understanding of CRT, and their reasons for opposition. In order to contextualize the debate and controversy around Critical Race Theory, background context is provided to investigate the origins of Critical Race Theory as a nationwide controversy. Literature around the fields of critical whiteness and Critical Race Theory is explored to gain an understanding of current literature around racial identity development, “colorblind” mentality, racial innocence, and the theoretical roots of Critical Race Theory. Interview methodology is explained for the thirteen qualitative interviews conducted for this research. Data analysis

is conducted focused on the key themes of color and power evasiveness, racial innocence and neutrality of white children, and perceptions of race as an opposition to Critical Race Theory. The discussion section contains reflections on the relationship between this research topic and COVID-19, and the implications of this research which are divided into barriers to historically accurate teachings on race and strategies to overcoming said barriers, as well as considerations for future research. This paper concludes with the reassertion of concern for children through a colorblind lens guided by beliefs around racial neutrality and innocence as playing a pivotal role in the controversy and opposition to Critical Race Theory, as well as an emphatic call to support the educators on the front lines fighting to teach historically accurate teachings on race.

#### *The Emergence of Conservative Opposition to Critical Race Theory*

In the Summer of 2020, Seattle area conservative activist Christopher Rufo utilized the Freedom of Information Act to compile information related to DEI and anti-racist training across the country (Wallace-Wells 2021). Rufo noted these anti-racist trainings often cited the works of authors such as Robin DiAngelo and Ibram X. Kendi, who in turn frequently cited a term described as “Critical Race Theory”.

On September 2, 2020, Rufo appeared on the Tucker Carlson show on Fox News and stated Critical Race Theory had “pervaded every aspect of the federal government [...and was] an existential threat to the United States.” After Rufo’s appearance on the Tucker Carlson show, former president Donald Trump was reportedly influenced to take federal action (Wallace-Wells 2021) to prohibit federal employees (including contractors) from holding racial sensitivity training and included references to the banning of training

featuring racial “scapegoating” and stereotyping, white privilege and systemic racism in an Executive Order (Executive Order 13950 2020).

Executive Order 13950 and the appearance of Christopher Rufo on the Tucker Carlson show created a chain effect of statewide legislation and subsequent nationwide conservative panic over concerns related to the teaching of Critical Race Theory in Schools (Wallace-Wells 2021). As of May 12, 2022, seventeen states had explicitly banned teaching about topics such as Critical Race Theory, White privilege, institutional racism, and racial justice in K-12 schools or governmental training (Schwartz 2022).

On May 15, 2021, Rufo tweeted:

We have successfully frozen their brand—"critical race theory"—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category.

Moments later, Rufo followed up his statement, stating:

The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think "critical race theory." We have decodified the term and will recodify it to annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans.

Rufo transparently framed his motivations to introduce Critical Race Theory into the public conversation through explicit associations with “cultural insanities” unpopular with Americans. After Christopher Rufo’s September 2nd appearance on the Tucker Carlson show, there was an immediate spike in interest around the term “Critical Race Theory”.



Figure 1 - Google Trends Data from February 2018 - January 2023 with a marker for September 6-12, 2020

Utilizing Google Trends search data over the course of the past five years (roughly early February 2018 to late January 2023) for Google searches for the term “Critical Race Theory,” there is a notable first upward trend in the week after Christopher Rufo’s first appearance on the Tucker Carlson show. The values presented on the Google Trends chart represent popularity. A value of 100 refers to peak popularity, a score of 50 refers to half as popular, and a score of 0 refers to insufficient data for the term.

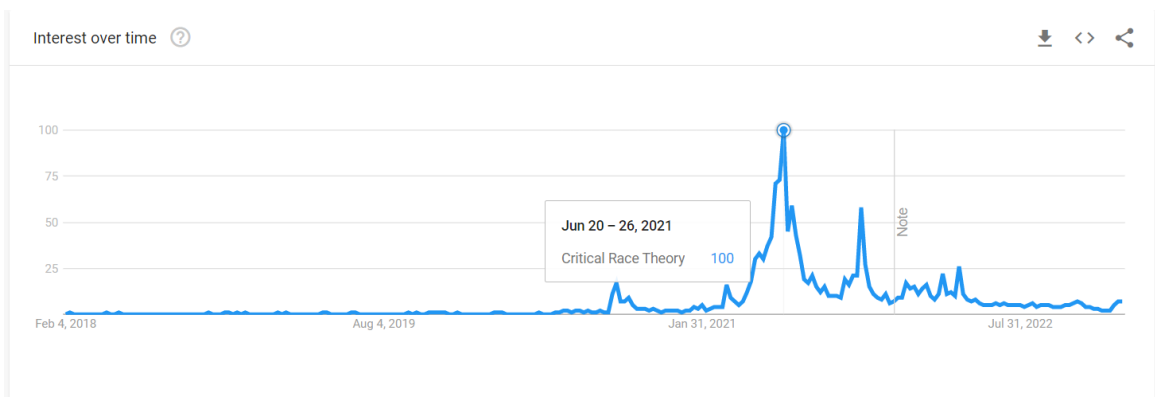


Figure 2 - Google Trends data from February 2018 - January 2023 with a marker for June 20 - 26, 2021.

The peak popularity of the term appears to coincide with legislation passing relating to the banning of Critical Race Theory in Florida, Idaho, Utah, New Hampshire, and Texas, which all occurred between April - June 2021. Prior to Christopher Rufo's September appearance on the Tucker Carlson show, there was limited and static interest in Critical Race Theory. Google Trends search data from January 2018 - April 2020 (the relevant period prior to Christopher Rufo's Tucker Carlson appearance and before the Black Lives Matter protests in May 2020) shows related topics searched by those who also search Critical Race Theory.

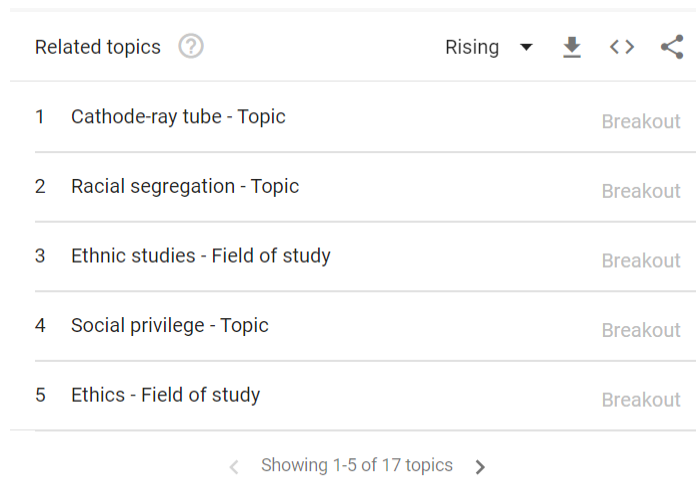


Figure 3 - Related topics from Google Trends from January 2018 - April 2020

Google Trends data from January 2018 - April 2020 shows search topics related to Critical Race Theory as largely linked to academic fields<sup>1</sup>. Related fields of study, such

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the first result, 'Cathode-ray tube' is likely included in the top five topics due to the shared acronym with the Critical Race Theory of 'CRT' and not relevant to the broader topic, except to indicate there were so few searches for Critical Race Theory that the list of related topics is topped with a vacuum tube related to an entirely different discipline.



as ethnic studies and legal studies, commonly utilize Critical Race Theory in academic thought and writing. Racial segregation and social privilege are commonly utilized terms when discussing race in sociology and ethnic studies.

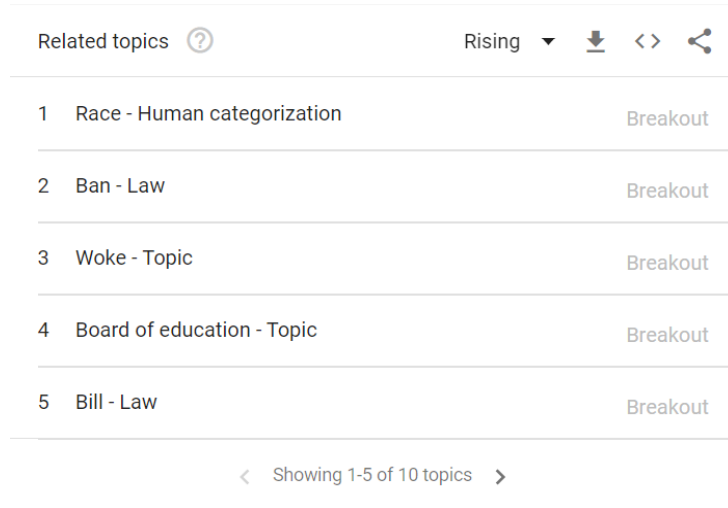


Figure 4 - Google Trends data from September 2020 - January 2023

In contrast, Google Trends data from September 2020 (when Christopher Rufo first appeared on FOX news) - January 2023 shows a drastic shift in the language of related topics. The language around related topics reflects the larger discourse that has become associated with legislation banning Critical Race Theory in schools. Related topics such as “ban” and “bills” point to the quick politicization of CRT. Utilizing the terminology from Sociologist Hannah Dixon’s writing on the CRT controversy in schools (2022), it is helpful to distinguish between the CRT that is familiar within academia (ACRT or Academic CRT) and the politically constructed CRT present in the news (PCRT or Politicized CRT). The transition between the terminology of CRT being recognized and perceived as Academic CRT to becoming recognized as Politicized CRT is exemplified when examining Figure 3 in comparison to Figure 4, both listed above.

Figure 4 shows the search term of “Critical Race Theory” becoming associated with the term “woke”.

The term “woke” has picked up steam within conservative activism and often become interwoven with PCRT. In December 2021, FOX news reporter Michael Ruiz published an article entitled “What does ‘woke’ mean?”<sup>2</sup>. In the article, Ruiz describes the evolution of the term woke as originating in AAVE to mean those aware of injustice and racial tension but goes on to state, “many people now interpret woke to be a way to describe people who would rather silence their critics than listen to them.” Ruiz’s new interpretation of woke encapsulates conservative sentiment and narratives. Ruiz describes the rise of woke, stating:

[...] The meaning of woke evolved again with the rise of "cancel culture" -- as the two terms saw increased use, they became intertwined in the public consciousness. Often, someone gets canceled after they say something insensitive – something not woke

“Wokeness” is often accused or perceived as a way to enforce progressive beliefs and “cancel”<sup>3</sup> those who disagree with these beliefs. A July 2021 article written by Fox News reporter Kelsey Koberg entitled “The woke mob is everywhere: Here's where it came from and how one critic believes it can be stopped” further dives into the topic. Koberg

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<sup>2</sup> The usage of a Fox News article is not to imply accuracy over the definition of the term “woke” but to instead illustrate oppositional narratives and what the word means to those opposed to CRT and other similar ideas.

<sup>3</sup> In this situation, canceled refers to a public cry for accountability, often over social media. To cancel someone often refers to social exclusion, boycotts, or protests due to the problematic behavior of the accused (often connected to racism, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, classism.). Cancellation largely refers to calls for the de-platforming of a public figure, company or organization due to their problematic behavior.

describes “wokeness” as an ideology drastically increasing beginning in April-May 2020, in large part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests after the murder of George Floyd. Koberg’s article largely utilizes quotations from Hoover

Institution senior fellow Victor Davis Hanson, where Hanson stated:

They infiltrated these [government and news] institutions and took them over [...]So that’s what explains why an agenda that has very little popular support continues to thrive. [...]Republicans] are very polite, they don’t cancel people out, they don’t boycott, they don’t get angry and noisy. And I think that has to end [...] The people who oppose woke ideology are half the country [...] But they aren’t organized like the left is.

When interviewed, Hanson described the “woke mob” as infiltrating American institutions despite having little public support. Notably, Hanson’s statement positions the “woke mob” as an angry, dangerous, and powerful enemy infiltrated into government<sup>4</sup> and news systems. According to Hanson, this small but dangerous “woke mob” is responsible for the push for CRT, cancel culture, and open borders. The illustration of a small yet powerful group willing to go to extreme means paints an evocative image of an enemy for many conservatives to set their sights on combatting. Hanson even issues a call to action for Republicans to “get angry and noisy”, utilizing the same methods of the left “woke mob”. The portrayal of this mythologized enemy of the right (portrayed by Hanson as moderate, well-mannered, and polite) is portrayed as a threat to the American people.

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<sup>4</sup> Notably, this language is quite similar to the language of Christopher Rufo who is discussed previously in this section.

The construction of Politicized Critical Race Theory (PCRT) as a threat to the American people, in particular, conservatives, is a far cry from the Academic Critical Race Theory (ACRT) of sociology, ethnic studies, and critical legal studies. So, what is Critical Race Theory really? How has it become constructed as this cultural threat? What are the implications of the opposition to CRT and what impact could it have? What is the relationship between the threat to whiteness and opposition to CRT? To understand these questions framing my research, this next section will explore the emerging literature on opposition to CRT, moral panics, and white emotionalities.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As opposition to Critical Race Theory (as we know it in 2023) is relatively recent, the literature behind this anti-CRT movement is sparse compared to other fields. Despite this, there has been a significant increase in academic literature about the anti-CRT movement since 2021/22. While this increase is notable, it should be remarked that literature around opposition to CRT is perpetually evolving in parallel to the ongoing pushback against CRT. This literature review will explore the foundational beginnings of Critical Race Theory and its role in education, the moral panic of CRT, the alarming implications of censorship and threats to academic freedom through anti-CRT legislation, and lastly, the white emotionalities and colorblindness shaping this discourse.

### *I - What is CRT?*

To understand the backlash to [politicized] Critical Race Theory today, we must first understand what [academic] Critical Race Theory is and its subsequent relationship to education. [Academic] Critical Race Theory refers to a theory and frame of analysis for understanding the impact of race and ethnicity on social, legal, political, and economic systems. Critical Race Theory was developed in the 1970s out of the field of Critical Legal Studies from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Early CRT was largely based on (but not limited to) the work of authors such as Cheryl L. Harris, Kimberle Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, Charles Lawrence, and Lani Guinier. Critical Race Theory served as a movement of oppositional scholarship, challenging the norms of the white experience

through the centering of the experience, culture, and history of people of color (Matsuda 1987; Taylor 1998).

The introduction of Critical Race Theory as a movement of legal scholarship born in the 1970s was created from the lack of progress in civil rights litigation to produce meaningful racial reform (Minda 1995; Taylor 1998). The movement towards Critical Race Theory has grown not only in the field of legal scholarship but has expanded to fields such as education, sociology, and women's studies (Taylor 1998). Critical Race Theory can be described by a specific set of themes, listed below (Taylor 1998):

1. Racism is a normal, not rare facet of daily life in American society.
2. Racism has been so normalized that it is often rendered unrecognizable.  
The normalization of expected, race-based practices in employment, housing, and education makes racism appear ordinary and normal.
3. Individual racist acts are not isolated instances of bigoted behavior but part of the larger structure of white hegemony.
4. CRT is deeply dissatisfied with traditional civil rights litigation and liberal reforms, many scholars have lost faith in traditional legal remedies.
5. Colorblindness makes no sense in a society that has historically (and continues to) treat people differently on the basis of group membership.
6. Colorblindness poses a danger through ignoring the racial construction of whiteness and reinforcing privileged and oppressive positions (Taylor 1998: 122-123).

In 1995, Gloria Ladson Billings and William Tate introduced CRT as a framework to the educational research community to examine educational inequity (Ladson Billings and Tate 1995). The introduction of CRT into education was targeted at critiquing superficial, surface-level solutions to prejudice, such as multicultural education, that failed to address core issues around racism. Since the introduction of Critical Race Theory into educational research, CRT is largely utilized in favor of achieving equitable teaching and learning practices around race. CRT offers the opportunity for educators to critically interrogate pedagogical practices to understand the racial implications of their teaching and students' learning experiences (Matias, 2023; Romero et al., 2009).

## *II – CRT as a moral panic*

The moral panic of [politicized] CRT has been paralleled by the Red Scare sentiment of McCarthyism of the 1940s and 1950s (López 2021; Conway 2022; Jaeger 2022; Hsu Accomando and Anderson 2023), the Kanawha County textbook controversy of 1974 after the introduction of increasingly diverse and multicultural textbooks in West Virginia (Kearl 2023), the 2010 Tucson Unified School District ethnic studies ban, and similar contemporary attacks on Sexual Education, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and the bathroom access rights of transgender students (López 2021; Jaeger 2022; Kearl 2023; Miller, Liu, and Ball 2023). Moral panics appear in society when a person, group, condition, or episode poses a threat to societal values and interests (Cohen 2011:1). The moral panic around CRT (Hsu Accomando and Anderson 2023; Miller, Liu, and Ball 2023), as discussed earlier, is a manufactured panic targeting the teaching of race and

social justice-oriented education in schools. While [academic] Critical Race Theory informed research and curricula have been present in education since (at least) 1995, the direct teaching of [academic or politicized] Critical Race Theory to K12 schoolchildren has not occurred. Despite this, the idea that [politicized] Critical Race Theory has become (or is in danger of becoming) a central part of K12 curricula has been pervasive amongst the conservative right. While the initial panic has been spearheaded by conservative activist Christopher Rufo, Rufo has not been the only person to perpetuate this moral panic.

This moral panic has been fueled by white backlash and conservative messaging (Benson 2022). After the murder of George Floyd, the term “systemic racism” was used more times in the media, than in the past 30 years combined (Chin 2021). The sudden propulsion of the term systemic racism into the mainstream discourse proved contentious for the conservative right, who moved to ban terms such as systemic racism, white supremacy, and white privilege from discussion in the classroom (Benson 2022; Ray and Gibbons 2021; Wallace-Wells 2021). In a four-month span, FOX news mentioned the term “Critical Race Theory” more than 1,300 times (Benson 2022). Despite this, many white Americans had little understanding of what [academic] CRT was, except for the belief that it had no place being taught in schools (Benson 2022; Lerer and Epstein 2021; and Gray 2021).

A moral panic has been created over a non-existent school curriculum, allegedly designed to shame and guilt white children for their whiteness and responsibility for white supremacy. Virginia news sites largely owned by the Metric Media and Donors



Trust ran roughly 4,657 anti-CRT articles in 2021 and donated \$90 million in 2019 (Benson 2022; Gabbatt 2021). In 2021, Florida news media organizations ran 11,988 anti-CRT articles, Texas ran 10,096, Ohio ran 6,252, and New Hampshire ran 2,162 (Benson 2022; Gabbatt 2021).

Mass media plays three key roles in moral panics (Cohen 2011). First, the media sets the agenda by selecting what “deviant” events are considered newsworthy. Second, it transmits claim-makers' claims, refining and simplifying their rhetoric in the process. Third, the media makes claims of moral denouncement through their own claims-making.

FOX news headlines such as “Identity politics, critical race theory destroying our society: J.D. Vance” (Chamberlain 2021) and “California school district reportedly encourages using witchcraft on people who say all lives matter” (Dorman 2021b) showcase the claims-making of FOX news. Cohen (2011) describes folk devils as a person or group scapegoated for social problems. The discourse around Critical Race Theory in the media has created the image of a vague, nameless villain pushing Critical Race Theory into schools: the folk devil. This folk devil has been presented as Black Lives Matter protestors, school boards with an agenda of indoctrination, and largely leftist people of color (of which disproportionately Black people have been targeted). Once the folk devil has been identified as a villain and easy scapegoat for societal problems, this allows for the development of a subsequent moral panic.

Cohen categorizes three components of media characterizations of folk devils. First, exaggeration or distortion, in which the media “over reports” the seriousness of the

issue, level of damage, and scale and creates sensationalizing misleading headlines with melodramatic language. FOX News has often “overreported” through their misleading headlines such as: “Critical Race Theory infiltrating America’s 25 most elite private K-12 schools, according to new study” (Flood 2021) and “Shocking video exposes school officials plotting to ‘trick’ Ohio parents, teach CRT” (Hill 2023). These stories enter the public consciousness, later shaping societal reactions to future events.

The second component Cohen (2011) identifies is prediction, in which events depicted in the news are not one-time occurrences but, in fact, indicators of a new reality and future. The reporting affiliated with folk devils warns of the inevitable next time, worsening conditions and future. FOX news headlines such as, “If you question critical race theory, crazed ideologues will attack you and hurt your children” (Carlson 2021) featured the following statement:

By daring to complain about [anti-racist education discussing power and oppression]<sup>5</sup> at Columbus Academy, [school admin claimed] the two [anti-CRT] mothers had caused, ‘pain, and even fear for physical safety, among students, families, faculty, and staff.’ In other words, [school administrators threaten] if you dare to question us, we won’t disagree with you, we’ll attack you, we’ll hurt your children, and we’ll accuse you of assault. You’re making us afraid.

Surrounding this statement, two white mothers in Ohio campaigned for their children’s elite private schools to remove what they described as Critical Race Theory and anti-

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<sup>5</sup> The parentheses are my own additions to add accurate context to the school curricula that is present in the surrounding article and to reflect the original sentiment of the author. The original quotation reads as: “According to Soderberg and Kass, by daring to complain about racism at Columbus Academy, the two mothers had caused, ‘pain, and even fear for physical safety, among students, families, faculty, and staff’ In other words, if you dare to question us, we won’t disagree with you, we’ll attack you, well hurt your children, and we’ll accuse you of assault. You’re making us afraid.”

conservative sentiment from the curricula. In response, school administrators issued a letter to both families that their children would not be re-enrolled in the school the following Fall due to the parents leading a large misinformation campaign against the school and violating the enrollment policy describing a positive working policy between the school and parents (Widman Neese 2021). The FOX News article instead predicts a contentious future due to the folk devils of [politicized] CRT, posing an active threat to the safety of students. When these predictions fail to come true, news outlets will still report on “non-events,” drawing on the fear and surrounding sentiment of what could happen as opposed to the reality of what has happened. FOX published non-event articles with headlines such as, “As media push critical race theory, Ayaan Hirsi Ali fears curriculum will teach children to ‘hate each other’” (O’Brien 2021) and “Virginia teacher says colleagues ‘afraid’ to oppose critical race theory” (2021). This commitment to reporting on inaction and non-events guarantees “truth” of the predictions will be reported, regardless of event or non-event (Cohen 2011:35).

The third component of media characterization of folk devils that Cohen (2011) identifies is symbolization, or the transformation of words and images associated with a person or group, with largely innocuous origins to being stripped of meaning and used in a negative context. These symbols are used as unambiguously derogatory shorthand to trigger negative feelings about the folk devils. These symbols are selected to fit into the pre-existing, exaggerated narrative. Christopher Rufo’s aforementioned tweets about the public associating various “cultural insanities” with [politicized] CRT lend insight into the process of symbolization; the very term Critical Race Theory or its abbreviation CRT

have been transformed into largely negative symbols of the push towards culturally responsive, historically accurate teachings around race. Other decontextualized symbols of this push towards historically accurate teachings around race have included Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), [white] privilege, systemic racism, and oppression. These terms are common in anti-CRT articles and discourse to poke at the alleged ridiculousness of teaching against American exceptionalism.

At the center of these stories are the largely white suburban parents claiming to protect their children from the indoctrination of the public school system. Despite little to no evidence of CRT being taught in schools, the media has played a pivotal role in fueling the flames of hysteria around Critical Race Theory through the shaping of the nameless folk devil of CRT and continuous moral panic. The sensationalism portrayed through the media has created an alarming impact, not only in the rapid spread of disinformation but in the increasingly significant threat to academic freedom.

### *III - Academic censorship*

Perhaps the greatest threat presented by the CRT opposition is the looming threat to academic freedom through censorship (Iftikar, Hoa Khoa Nguyen, and Byers, 2022). The construction of politicized CRT has disturbing implications for education. Legislation restricting the academic freedom of faculty poses a troubling concern to the constitutional right to freedom of speech. Proposed and passed legislation restricting what teachers can instruct on in the classroom creates significant interference with the pursuit of critical inquiry, core freedoms, and foundations of democracy. While past cases put before the United State Supreme Court have determined public school educators have the

right to speak about matters of public concern (Pickering vs. Board of Education 1968), they have also determined that private grievances of public school employees are not protected (Connick vs. Meyers 1983) (Iftikar, Hoa Khoa Nguyen, and Byers 2022). The opposition to CRT, from the legal perspective, is in a gray area when it comes to the dilemma of what is a public concern and what is a private grievance. The social issues applicable to white communities are often labeled as a public concern, versus many of the issues impacting communities of color may be labeled as a private grievance.

The anti-CRT push towards censorship and limitations on academic freedom poses troubling concerns for the public school system in the midst of a nationwide teacher shortage (Mazyck Jayakumar and Kohli Varghese 2023). Utilizing a survey of 117 K12 educators, Mazyck Jayakumar, and Kohli (2023) conducted an exploratory analysis of how educators were impacted by actual or proposed legislative bans on CRT. Roughly 79% of respondents described the bans as negative for education and society (102). Only 13% of respondents indicated that the bans were good or okay (104). 10% of respondents who believed bans were negative for education and society believed the bans had a negative impact on educators as a whole (103). Nearly a third of participants described claims of Critical Race Theory being taught in K12 schools as a purposeful spread of misinformation (103). 54% of respondents answered they would not consider taking a job in a state that attempts to or has banned CRT from being taught in schools (104). Educators in states that had banned CRT reported higher levels of burnout as opposed to educators who were not in ban states.

Attacks on CRT are not limited only to K12. They also hold dangerous ramifications for higher education. Higher education institutions have a deep commitment to fostering critical inquiry, and reasoning, even in the face of difference and disagreement (Conway 2022). The production of knowledge from higher education institutions, both from research and teaching, is critical to democracy. Conway argues that these attacks are undemocratic and indicative of larger assaults on progressive teachings and intellectualism (711). The persecution of teaching the truth about America's racial history poses a dangerous precedent for white dominance, forcing the creation of a false, mythologized narrative of American history (Conway 2022).

#### *IV - White emotions, emotionalities, and colorblindness*

Ultimately, these key themes in the literature of opposition to Critical Race Theory are united by core issues of white emotionalities. White emotionalities refer to the deep core values and emotions of white people; these emotions and values are the causation of emotionally defensive reactions - as notably described in the writing of Education Scholar Cheryl E. Matias. white emotionalities refer to core underlying beliefs and values shaping [white] understanding of the world (Matias 2023: 3-5; Matias 2021; Matias 2016b). The threatening of these core values triggers surface level [white] emotions such as fear, guilt, and shame, which act to disguise the larger underlying feelings such as fears around loss of identity, and challenges to world view (Matias 2023).

What perhaps makes the opposition to CRT unique in contrast to prior moral panics and attacks on public education, is the centering of white children under the guise

of protecting their emotional state from discomfort (Kearl 2023). Not only have white children been centered in the discourse around [politicized] CRT, the protection of white children's emotionalities have appeared centerfold in the language of proposed and passed legislation banning CRT. white emotionalities have been used to construct an image of fear around CRT (Matias 2023). Guilt and shame are powerful emotionalities. Sociologist Jennifer Eichstedt pointedly describes guilt as an unproductive feeling in the fight for racial justice (2001). In the early stages of learning about the powerful role of white privilege, many white people are caught in a stage of guilt. This is notably described by Robin DiAngelo (2011) as part of the experience of "white fragility". When first met with the knowledge of one's own privilege aiding the cause of white supremacy, many jump towards feelings of shame or guilt, for their own involvement. These feelings of shame can in fact be debilitating, particularly in the fight towards racial justice. While some internalize these feelings as self-deficiencies, others may lash out, reacting with defensiveness in an effort to relieve themselves of guilt.

Guilt, in the fight for racial justice, does not serve any party. In fact, the emotions and associations triggered by guilt are powerful enough to create legislation intended to prevent these negative feelings. This defensiveness has been used to avoid accountability in the interest of protecting white comfort (DiAngelo 2011, Matias and DiAngelo 2013, Applebaum 2017, and Mazyck Jayakumar and Kohli 2023). The United States legal system's ability to prioritize and center white comfort and emotions only further reinforce the power of white supremacy in contemporary society (Freeman 1995). white

emotionalities recycle power structures (Ahmed 2004; Matias et al. 2016; Mazyck Jayakumar and Kohli 2023) and hold immense power in perpetuating white supremacy.

White rage and grievances have played an exceedingly powerful role in shaping the racial politics of the United States. While the election of former President Donald J. Trump is often attributed to widespread economic anxieties<sup>6</sup>, white emotionalities over perceived threats to whiteness formed as white rage, playing the largest role in Trump's path to the White House (Benson 2022). While people of color are often accused of "playing the race card" or practicing identity politics, white people also participate in identity politics. These identity politics are not utilized in the effort to achieve racial equity but rather to solidify racial dominance and hierarchies (Benson 2022; DeVega 2019).

For many people that have been raised with a "colorblind" mindset, the naming of race is an affront to white emotionalities and preconceived notions around racial equality. The teachings under the guise of "multiculturalism" assert all races to be given equal opportunities and treatment and for true racial equality to look like a lack of acknowledgment over racial and ethnic differences. Colorblind racism, as described by sociologist Eduardo Bonilla Silva, is "racism without racists" (2003:29). To understand colorblind ideology, it is necessary to utilize the framework of Bonilla Silva's central

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<sup>6</sup> The median income of Trump supporters was 70k/year, far higher than the depictions of Trump supporters as largely poverty stricken and desperate for economic change to escape from class standings (Benson 2022, Anderson 2016)



frames of colorblind racism. Bonilla Silva argues that post-Jim Crow era, whites no longer utilize the blatant absolutes of racism (2003:25). This, however, does not mean the end of racism and instead, a new racial ideology known as colorblind racism emerges (25). Bonilla Silva divides these frames into four central categories: Abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will be focusing on the most applicable frames to this research, abstract liberalism and minimization. Abstract liberalism, described by Bonilla-Silva as the most important frame of colorblind racism, refers to using ideas associated with political liberalism such as equal opportunity, individualism, and choice to understand racial matters (26-28). When whites utilize the language around liberalism, they easily appear to be reasonable or moral while simultaneously opposing approaches to de facto racism. Abstract liberalism largely builds on the idea that each person is an individual with equal choices and opportunities.

The second frame utilized in this thesis, minimization, is centered around the claim that racial discrimination is no longer a central factor impacting the life outcomes of people of color (29). Minimization operates largely through the invalidation of the contemporary experiences of people of color by suggesting that people of color are being hypersensitive or imagining racism where there is none (29). Minimization often compares contemporary experiences of people of color to Jim Crow-era racism or any experiences of pre-Civil Rights Era racism to claim that people of color today have it much better. Bonilla-Silva states that “if minority groups face group-based discrimination and whites have group-based advantages, demanding individual treatment for all can only

benefit the advantaged group” (36). Minimization utilizes the fallacy of racial pluralism, which falsely assumes equal power and opportunity in America. Since whites have more power, their choices “help reproduce a form of white supremacy in neighborhoods, schools, and society” (36). This portrayal of racism is largely based on an essentialist centered framework focused on absolutes (29, 47). From Bonilla Silva’s interviews, he notes that nearly every respondent mentioned the “exceptional Black” and often agreed in principle with racially progressive notions (48). Bonilla Silva describes colorblind racism as “pliable” with how it gives room for exceptions to narratives (such as the “exceptional Black”) and the lack of reliance on absolutes (48). Bonilla Silva argues that colorblind racism offers the tools for many to escape “dangerous racial minefields” through the declaration of insisting one is not prejudiced or racist (48-49).

Sociologist Ruth Frankenberg (1993) instead refers to “colorblindness” by the term color or power evasiveness, to describe the dodging of racial conversations or engagement with race, often systematically exposing the unequal power dynamics that white people benefit from. These feelings of discomfort and guilt as a common reason for color and power evasion, color and power evasion produce the image of a white self innocent of racism (Frankenberg 1993).

The usage of a color-evasive approach is often linked to the idea of “colormuteness” where conversations around race are shut down, labeling race to be an inappropriate topic of conversation (Castagno 2008). This attempt to remain neutral reinforces whiteness, and the avoidance and shutting down of so-called divisive conversations legitimate whiteness and aid in the invalidation of people of color. Race is

often considered a taboo topic not to be discussed, something that is impolite or improper to mention, creating the implication of non-whiteness (as non-whiteness is often what is considered “race,” while whiteness is considered the default and neutral) as something that is wrong, bad, or improper (Frankenberg 1993).

Whiteness is universalized, unchallenged, and unspoken when it comes to racial relations in the United States (Frankenberg 1993). The challenge of whiteness, as the unassumed default, has proved to be a powerful trigger for white emotionalities. The central goals of Critical Race Theory are to challenge colorblindness, to acknowledge racism as a common experience, and establish counternarratives of people of color to prove provoking white emotionalities, pulling whiteness into the spotlight. Whiteness is often afforded the benefit of presumed innocence. This innocence is often used as justification for the violence of whiteness (Lawrence 2023).

The desire to silence discussion around systemic racism is rooted in white innocence and prevents the alleged anguish of white children, who would be unable to be exposed to such sensitive material (Matias 2023). The emotions of white children are persistently elevated and prioritized over the emotions of children of color (Matias 2016). This arrangement of emotional hierarchy through white victimhood allows whites to prioritize their own emotions when they perceive emotional hurt and damage while delegitimizing the experience of people of color to avoid accountability when their (white emotions) cause harm to people of color (Zembylas 2021, Matias 2023).

Being described as a racist is a common fear held by many white Americans. As described by Srivastava (2005:46), being called racist is often deemed as an attack on

“goodness” and moral character. The label of racist has so closely been tied with descriptions and imagery of “evil” that to be called a racist is often connotated with being called unwaveringly and unequivocally evil. Frankenberg’s interview research with white women noted repeated references to racism as a personal or the “original sin” (1993:173). To be labeled as racist triggers immediate associations of an imagined racist identity, constructed at the core and unable to be fixed. Srivastava notes that the accusation of being racist often dredges up associated emotions of fear, anger, and despair (46). To many of the interviewees, to be accused of playing a role in racism is a direct attack on the morality and “goodness” of themselves and their children that may also bring up feelings of shame.

White people engaged in both avoidance and anger in their color evasiveness, often feeling emotionally frozen and angry about “being made to feel anything related to racism” (Matias 2023:115). White people's experience of being emotionally angry and frozen is easily triggered by the challenging of their color-evasive views around race when confronted with historically accurate telling of race, systemic racism, and white privilege.

#### *Understanding backlash to CRT*

Current literature has focused on the commentary and narrative analysis of the opposition to CRT. These narratives have largely been identified through the examination of proposed and passed legislation. As current literature around CRT opposition has mostly consisted of commentary and theoretical and narrative analysis, there is a significant indication of a gap in the present literature on the opinions, knowledge, and

narrative of parents opposed to CRT. Mazyck Jayakumar and Kohli's work (2023) contains survey data on the experiences of over one hundred educators in relation to anti-CRT legislation, and Dixon's (2022) interviews consist of educators and school board members.

At the present time, there is either exceptionally limited or no present literature available featuring the qualitative interviews of the parents and community members guiding the resistance to CRT on a local level. Previous literature has largely focused on anti-CRT legislation and examined PCRT as a purposeful disinformation campaign and moral panic. While this understandably frames the opponents of PCRT on a greater scale, little is documented in the academic literature about the opposition on the local level. Who are the people on the Facebook comments, in the quote tweets on Twitter, and at the public comment section of local school board meetings? Do their knowledge of CRT and opposition parallel the frames and narratives presented in current literature, or are they something else entirely?

This thesis research explores the opposition to Critical Race Theory through qualitative interviews with parents and community members to understand their reasons for opposition and perceptions of CRT.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on semi-structured interviews with thirteen parents and community members in rural areas of Washington State between November 2021 and January 2022. 4 interviewees identified as having neutral or positive feelings towards Critical Race Theory. 9 interviewees identified as having negative feelings towards Critical Race Theory. Ten respondents identified as female, 2 respondents identified as male, and 1 respondent identified as non-binary. 2 identified as Asian and eleven as white.

### *Recruitment and Interviews*

The IRB approved the study on September 28, 2021 (IRB 21-024) (Appendix C, Figure 9). The initial proposal focused on recruiting parents and guardians of children enrolled in Green Valley School District in rural northwestern Washington. To increase participant numbers, I later expanded recruitment criteria including participants who were not parents or guardians (IRB modifications October 25 and November 30, 2021). I recruited participants through several Facebook posts on local community Facebook pages. In addition, I created and posted a digital flyer on Facebook to garner attention. Interested respondents were emailed the consent form to participate in the study. Once respondents consented to participation, I scheduled Zoom or phone interviews that ranged from 30-60 minutes. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview format. Utilizing an interview guide approved by the IRB, interviewees were asked roughly seventeen questions and numerous follow-up questions (Appendix A, Figure 8) about their answers for in-depth responses. Demographic information was collected, such as

how long interviewees had lived in the area and the number and ages of their children (if applicable). Information was additionally collected on the news consumption of interviewees, their understanding of Critical Race Theory, their level of involvement in their children's education, and their core values.

Interviewees were invited to deviate from questions to share their personal experiences and views on surrounding issues around race, schooling, and politics. In response, questions were adapted to follow their path of deviation. Questions that invoked comprehensive and helpful responses from respondents were noted and utilized in further interviews.

#### *Data Analysis - Google Trends*

To establish a pattern around the distinctive shift in the language used around Critical Race Theory in recent years, data was utilized from Google Trends. Google Trends is a search analysis website run by Google that graphs and displays search inquiries over time and by popularity. Google Trends was utilized over the course of the last five years (early February 2018 to late January 2023) to view the development and change of interest over time in the search term "critical race theory." Google Trends data was also utilized from January 2018 - April 2020 to view related topics to the search term "critical race theory" and used to display changes in related topics from user searches between September 2020 - January 2023.

#### *Data Analysis - Interview Data*

Interviews were transcribed automatically through Otter.ai and manually edited to correct errors. All interviews were transcribed within two weeks of each interview

completion, and the audio recordings were deleted upon completion of transcription. At the beginning of each transcript, an interview summary was written summarizing the key points of the interview, the interviewee's background and opinion on CRT, emerging themes, and further points to investigate. Data analysis was conducted utilizing a grounded theory approach influenced by Kathy Charmaz (2014). Transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti for thematic analysis coding. Early transcripts were heavily coded with emerging themes (Charmaz 2014:112), regardless of initially perceived significance. Theoretical playfulness was used to experiment with different data interpretations and explore potential themes for data analysis (Charmaz 2014:137).

Over fifty codes were identified to analyze interview data. These codes were then divided into the following four code groups: parenting, interviewee background, understanding of race, and information sources. A full list of the codes identified in this study can be found in Appendix B, Figure 8.

### *Ethical Considerations*

In order to participate in this research, all interested parties were required to provide informed consent (Appendix A, Figure 6). The consent language detailed the nature of the research and the associated processes. Participants provided written agreement by replying affirmatively to an email with the consent form. I captured screenshots of those emails, saved them in a secure folder, and deleted the original email. While the consent language informed participants that interviews would be recorded, I reminded them again to ascertain verbal consent before beginning the recorded interviews.



Due to the community's small size, all interviewees were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Compared to research conducted in larger urban areas, it was even more essential to take additional measures to preserve participant privacy (Johnson 2002:116). Pseudonyms were selected by the researcher during the transcription process. Pseudonyms were selected that appropriately reflected the age group and cultural background of each participant. To preserve the identity of interviewees, any easily identifiable information related to their work, schooling, or general background was removed for privacy.

### *Reflexivity*

The formation of this project has required an immense amount of reflexivity as a researcher. As a researcher who occupies the socially lived position of a woman of color, conducting this research consistently forced me to re-evaluate pre-existing bias to understand my role and its impact on my research process (Heggen and Guillemin 2012:473). The research I conducted was partially inspired by my experiences growing up as a non-white person in a small, rural community. During COVID-19, I decided to conduct research centering on rural Northwestern Washington due to ease of access and overall familiarity. In the preliminary stages of research, my familiarity with the area and my lived experiences with race posed potential challenges to conducting this study and perpetuating my own narratives.

The consideration of my reflexivity led me to adopt a grounded theory approach. I came into my research with minimal expectations and sought to explore instead of verifying a hypothesis (Johnson 2001:112-13). Prior to conducting interviews, I did not

ask interviewees about their opinion of CRT. My recruitment for this research asked participants what their thoughts were on Critical Race Theory in our schools, and I spoke to participants who were in support of, neutral about, and opposed to Critical Race Theory. This meant that the first time I found out my interviewee's position on CRT was in the middle of my interview, AFTER having developed a rapport, limiting the potential impact of bias.

Due to picking an extremely controversial and topical issue for my research, it was vital to remain polite, friendly, and informative to anyone I encountered, even if they were not a research participant. I was acutely aware that regardless of how neutrally I presented my topic (see Appendix A, Figure 5), I would face difficult reception to recruitment and my overall work. My experiences were appropriately paralleled to the following quotation:

In a situation with multiple perspectives or interpretations, whose standards or criteria of truth prevail in the final report? This is the critical ethical question for in-depth interviewing. In several recent publications, Denzin discusses a short story written by Raymond Carver (1989) about a writer who returns [...] to find out that everyone there is angry with him because of what he has written about them. Denzin (1997:285-87) interprets the import of this story to be that "a writer is always selling someone out," meaning that, in virtually all complex settings in today's world, all interpretations and voices are subject to conflict and dispute [...] (Johnson 2002:116).

Whose truth prevails? When conducting research, I knew there was no way to present my work in a way that would be considered satisfactory to everyone. With a grounded theory approach, I did not go into my research with a concrete goal or agenda. Instead, I intended to understand better why parents and community members opposed Critical Race Theory in K-12 schools. Going into my data analysis, it was pivotal to approach my

work with integrity. I have kept the words of my interviewees as accurate and as true to life as possible while providing contextual information on our conversation and interviewees' lived experiences. Interviewee quotations have only been cut down for length or to minimize repetition for clarity purposes. No quotations have been removed or altered from their original context to misrepresent the words of an interviewee.

Going into data analysis, I knew many interviewees might disagree with my conclusions drawn. Throughout this process, it was profoundly imperative to work out of a praxis built out of compassion and thoughtfulness. While my interviewees and myself may draw different conclusions from the data, it was pivotal to analyze the data in up-to-date, current literature that reflects the current field of sociology. I have extended empathy and grace towards my interviews in my interpretations. No interviewees were experts in the field of race and ethnicity, nor did I expect them to be one. Interviewees were made up of parents and community members concerned for the future of their children and others. Many interviewees reflected confusion and uncertainty, and some even admitted humility at their lack of understanding of CRT. My goal throughout this research was not to frame the moral character of my interviewees but instead to profoundly and honestly understand their opposition to Critical Race Theory.

## “I DON’T WANT MY KIDS TO THINK THEY’RE BAD!”: FRAMING CONCERNS ABOUT CRT

Throughout the interview process, it became clear that the central motivation guiding interviewees' opposition to the so-called Critical Race Theory in schools was a concern for children. This concern for the well-being of children when “exposed” to Critical Race Theory manifested in several key themes. Interviewees expressed distinct concerns for both children of color and white children. These themes can be summarized as the following. First, exposing white children to CRT will teach white children to feel guilt and shame around their racial identity, and children will be unjustifiably accused of racism. Second, the exposure of children of color to CRT will teach children of color that they are perpetual victims and are unable to achieve greater life outcomes and are doomed to remain in a cycle of oppression. Third, the teaching of CRT, institutional racism, and systems of oppression infringe on the innocence of [implicitly white] children. Fourth, the teaching of CRT will create unnecessary division and harm children's social development.

### *Concern for White Children*

Throughout the interview process, a consistent fear emerged from interviewees. What if their [white] children are taught that they are “bad” or wrong because they are white? What if their [white] child messes up and is accused of being racist?

One of the most illustrative examples of this came from Renee, a white mother in her mid-forties and parent to two [white] children enrolled in local public schools in the Green Valley area. Renee’s opposition to Critical Race Theory was not hypothetical, and

she believed that local Green Valley schools were already teaching Critical Race Theory covertly. Renee repeatedly referenced the school district's implementation of verbiage she perceived to be associated with Critical Race Theory. Renee drew on her conversations and experiences with her [white] son's exposure to Critical Race Theory in schools and their shared frustration.

[My son has] already experienced, in whatever form in school today. They've implemented a lot of the verbiage, and I think that my son gets worked up and he feels like he's at a disadvantage being a white male, which is the opposite of everything they're trying to teach, but he feels like he's attacked and looked at as the oppressor and he's just a good kid. And he feels like society is, you know, trying to push him down.

In the above quotation, Renee implicitly draws on the myth of reverse racism to describe her son's experience. Through the district's implementation of language related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, Renee has perceived her son as being attacked or singled out for his role in systemic oppression. Renee expressed her interpretation of her son's experience, calling attention to what she believed to be a shift in the racial power structures. Renee explained that the discussion of oppression enacted by white people through critiques of racism and the usage of DEI in school had developed a system of oppression blaming white students for racial history.

Intriguingly, the implicit language of her statement calling attention to her son being disadvantaged and "pushed down" by society brings an important discussion of the unsaid into the spotlight. The implications of the recent shift (as perceived by Renee and her son) to a disadvantaged position call attention to the silent implications: if Renee's son has recently moved into a disadvantaged position, implied to be the opposite of what

they are trying to teach, does this point to a subconscious acceptance and acknowledgment of Renee's son as previously being in a higher, more privileged position? The silent, subconscious, and unacknowledged parts of these discussions hold just as much if not more, significance than the verbalized acknowledgments. Renee's lack of acknowledgment of her son's (perceived) prior social positioning points to a discomfort with the labeling and acknowledgment of positions of power. Immediately following the previous quotation, Renee reflected:

So I just, I think that as long as people are studying history is great, but once you try labeling people in today's world, of what specific people have done in our past, that's ludicrous. And it's prejudice, and it's ridiculous because, you know, we're all born into the world today, and it is what we make of it. It isn't about the color of our skin. I know there's a lot of controversy on that. But I think as long as we focus on the color of our skin, [it's a] detriment.

In this sentiment, Renee appeared to reflect discomfort around the [implied] linkage of present-day accountability of white people to past harm perpetuated through white supremacy and colonization. Renee appeared to draw on instead a color and power evasive framework towards interpreting race relations. Utilizing a color and power evasive framework (Frankenberg 1993), it is not uncommon for people to allege accounts of "reverse racism" or prejudice targeted towards white individuals, as this framework does not acknowledge the systemic role of white supremacy and institutionalized racism.

Renee states that the focus and acknowledgment of skin color are harmful, as everyone has the same ability to make it and succeed. Renee's statements point to a belief in racial equality where there are no long-term impacts of systemic racism or racial tension, and everyone has the ability and opportunities to further their life. Assertions that

counter that narrative are perceived as a threat to that core value and the autonomy and well-being of others. The belief that everyone is afforded equal opportunities in life and it is merely what you make of it allows the [white] believer to avoid accountability and reflection for privileges they may have attained and ways they may have benefited from their racial background. If everyone is afforded the same privileges and opportunities from birth, no one person is more privileged than the other, and there is no need to rectify this.

When there is attention drawn to inequitable aspects of the American experience, largely based on race, this leads many to take the defensive side, insisting that since they did not perpetuate [essentialist] racism, they have no responsibility for the correction of these inequities (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Frankenberg 1993).

Interestingly, this seems to largely point to a difference in understanding of interpersonal as opposed to institutional racism. Many respondents appeared to imply that their understanding of racism was largely based on interpersonal racism, pointing to the responsibility for the enactment of racism to singular people. It appeared many respondents may have interpreted institutional racism to be a larger extension of interpersonal racism instead, assigning significant responsibility for racist structures to each individual white person.

A common theme related to concern for white children appeared to be the fear and evasion of the responsibility of racism as white individuals. When it came to Renee's son, her statements were addressing the perceived calls for accountability of white people for the broader role in systemic racism targeted towards the specific experiences of her

son. In an interview with Harper, a white mother in her mid-thirties and parent to three children enrolled in a private Christian school, Harper discussed her pressures of responsibility in the changing dynamics around discussions of race and racism.

Harper and her husband Adrian (also interviewed and mentioned later in this section) pulled their children out of Green Valley public schools out of concerns for their lack of autonomy in the classroom. Harper and Adrian both highly value the importance of Christianity as a constant presence in their children's education and desire to have their children's curricula incorporate their Christian faith and values. Harper and Adrian also find having control and awareness over what goes in the classroom to be extremely important, and they expressed concerns over the teaching of Sex Ed, CRT, and anything perceived as relating to gender identity being taught in their child's schools, which ultimately led them to withdraw their children from public school.

When discussing her concerns around CRT, Harper explained that one of her primary concerns was "consequences for people's thoughts." When pressed to elaborate on this key point, she reflected:

I think it categorizes people more into if someone feels something, oh, you're racist. It's more of the pointing the finger and that's what I mean by having a consequence-like, if you have an opinion, now someone's pointing the finger at you and you're like, Okay, I'm not racist, and then now it's a constant debate.

This perception of responsibility for racism may be why interviewees expressed fears that their [white] children would be shamed or think they're "bad" for their whiteness. As referenced in the literature review section on white emotionalities, many white Americans have significant fears around being called racist. To be racist is often



considered at odds with any “good” qualities or moral character. For many people like Harper, even the idea of being called racist triggers feelings of anger, shame, defensiveness, or being under attack. With the resistance and controversy to CRT, this feeling is magnified when parents believed their children were or might be accused of being racist.

An interview with Jordan, a white mother in her late forties with two [white] children enrolled in Green Valley schools, also brought up fears around children feeling shame or guilt. Similar to Renee, Jordan believed that parts of CRT are already being taught in Green Valley schools. Jordan expressed frequent confusion over what CRT really was, and that confusion often seemed to trigger unease and fear around the topic. Jordan’s understanding of CRT was largely tied to Sex-Ed curricula and perceived teachings around gender identity. Jordan feared that CRT could be highly dangerous and is largely based on pitting races against each other. Much of Jordan’s opposition to CRT was largely motivated by her concern for protecting her children’s innocence and ensuring they are not exposed to age-inappropriate topics. Jordan appeared to share concerns with Harper that her children would be accused of racism, which has been deemed an attack on an individual’s moral character.

I don't want my kids to think that they're bad. You know what I mean? Like, that's horrible, [...] because they're not bad. [...] I think racism is taught. Like, I don't think it's something you naturally are. You know, I think it's, you're taught it by, you know, comments or jokes or whatever, you know what it's taught. - Jordan

In this quotation, Jordan expressed her concern for her [white] children being shamed through the teaching of CRT. Jordan's concern centered around the fear that her [white] children would be taught that they are "bad" for being white.

Nicole, a Southeast Asian mother in her mid-forties, with two [multiracial, Southeast Asian and white] children, both enrolled in an online school due to COVID but transitioning back to in-person public schooling, also expressed similar sentiments to Jordan. Nicole is in an interracial marriage with a white man, who is the father of her two children. Nicole has heard about alleged experiences of other schools that have implemented CRT and is highly concerned about what she perceived to be shaming of white children for their racial identity. Nicole's children largely pass as white, and she expressed concerns that under CRT, they will be shamed for their whiteness. When reflecting on concerns around CRT in schools, Nicole reflected "if it's related to [...] you're going to teach my kids [...] that they should feel ashamed because they're white [...] I have a problem with that."

Returning to the idea that interviewees are expressing fear and evasion over the perception of responsibility for white individuals in racism, Nicole reflected, "I don't want my kids feeling guilty. Like there's nothing wrong with you." Nicole's statement towards her children appears to be based out of the concern that her children will feel responsible for something Nicole does not believe they contribute to (racism). Nicole, like many of the other interviewees, expressed that her children do not see color. Many interviewees appeared to be struggling with the perceptions of the threat of wrongfully being forced into a position of responsibility for their whiteness in the context of racism

and their core beliefs around not seeing color. If the interviewees and their children do not see color, how could they be racist? Therefore any accusations of racism on the basis of their whiteness must be false, and they are being unfairly targeted and discriminated against for their racial background. After all, who would want their child to be “blamed” for something they didn’t participate in directly?

The belief of many interviewees that their children are raised “not seeing color” appears to be tied to another commonly held belief that if their children are not taught explicitly racist beliefs and actions (also known as essentialist racism), their children will not learn to be racist. This was a common sentiment that routinely emerged throughout the interview process. This topic of “seeing color” and color and power evasiveness came up in an interview with Adrian, husband to Harper (discussed earlier in this section), a white father to three enrolled in a private Christian school in his mid-thirties. Like Harper, Adrian is strong in his Christian beliefs. Adrian firmly believes in keeping politics out of schools and that the government should have as little role in the parenting of his children as possible. He prefers schools to focus on core curricula along with biblical teachings. While he is open to including occasional lessons around different cultural backgrounds and experiences, Adrian believes there is no place in schools to discuss systems of oppression. Adrian is largely concerned with what he perceives to be the government's attempts to undermine his parenting and household beliefs. As a conservative Christian family, Adrian strongly advocates for his children not to see racial differences, he stated, “[CRT is] forcing our kids to see the world in color, which we don't advocate [for] that.”

This belief in “not seeing color” or color evasiveness is challenged by the ideas of Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory argues that there is no neutrality when it comes to our relationship to race. Despite the claims of many white Americans, it is impossible not to see color (Bonilla-Silva 2003). This belief in this sense of true neutrality and not seeing color may come from the common construction of whiteness as a place of neutrality. While many people of color are socially positioned and implicitly expected to see color, particularly as they experience microaggressions, oppression, and racism, white people are not expected to take notice of these experiences. The lack of general expectation to note racist experiences may give many white Americans the false understanding that they simply “do not see color.” While whiteness is consistently portrayed as the default, presumed baseline, it is not the foundational basis of neutrality it is often perceived to be. As noted by Frankenberg’s (1993) writing, whiteness is often unnamed and unmarked. Whiteness is unchallenged while also being universalized. Critical Race Theory argues that whiteness does not equal neutrality and that refusing to “see color” is in fact evasion of the societal power structures attached to race.

#### *Concern for Children of Color*

Intriguingly, a common theme opposing Critical Race Theory emerged as a concern for the Black community. Interviewees opposed to Critical Race Theory often expressed concerns that CRT would harm Black children by teaching them about their oppression. Several interviewees shared that racism was not inherent and had to be taught. Following that same logic, interviewees expressed concerns that oppression or

“victim mentality” was learned behavior. In the following quotation, Nicole expands on that belief:

But I guess, having people see themselves as victims versus someone who can actually make right choices and decisions to better their life and that they do have the ability to excel and that they can do it rather than, I'm oppressed because, you, the white person put me in this position.

Nicole, a Southeast Asian woman repeatedly expressed concerns throughout her interview that teaching CRT to children of color would cultivate a victim mentality and lack of accountability. Nicole expressed a keen desire for these students of color to succeed and worries that teaching them about their own oppression would lead to a lack of self-reliance. In this situation, Nicole feared that teaching students about their own oppression would lead to them focusing on obstacles due to their alleged oppression rather than how they could succeed, leading to lowered life outcomes.

Renee reflected on a similar sentiment around the potential damage created by teaching oppression, allegedly cultivating a “victim mentality”:

I know some of the things like math standards- they've talked about lowering even in Seattle [...] And I think you're belittling them when you think that they can't do math as well because of the color of their skin. I think that's damaging them. I think it's damaging them in their view of themselves. The school system is teaching them that they don't have to strive to do better and to learn, and all those things are that they're somehow limited by what they're able to do because of the color pigment on their skin. And that's just insane to me. [...] I don't think anyone should be held back. [...] [History has] proven that it doesn't matter what color your skin is or what your background is, you can- some people are successful from every walk and gender, everything [...]

During her interview, Renee was persistent that race, color, and gender had no impact on a person's future or possibilities. Renee expressed concern that stating otherwise could be harmful to students of color and create issues.

In Annika's interview, she expressed similar concerns to Renee. Annika remarked:

The biggest disadvantage, in my opinion, is to the Black members of our community, those smaller in number. I think that's honestly the biggest disadvantage. I know people always call me racist when I say that, and I don't understand. I think causing a lot of [attention to] a problem only makes it worse because then you get people who feel more like they get more upset and they're more outwardly, you know, like talking about it, and you know, like their friends or kids or whatever, hear that. I don't feel that the Black people in my community need my help. Like, I have the confidence that they are strong and capable and all those other things. I don't feel like I need to, like make them better, [like] it really bothers me like the like kind of like white savior complex.

In this quotation, Annika expresses her concern that CRT creates disadvantages for the Black community. In addition, Annika mentions that talking about these cycles of oppression may perpetuate white people stepping into white-savior roles. Annika's concern over white saviorism added nuance to this discussion. Annika expressed the self-awareness to acknowledge her whiteness and admitted that she, as a white woman, likely does not possess the tools or knowledge to uplift the Black community of Green Valley. However, Annika prefaced this statement with a largely simplistic, almost childlike understanding of racial relations, declaring that talking about racism would only make it worse and avoiding discussing it would make it disappear. Through their beliefs in widespread "equality" and racial neutrality, interviewees effectively argued oppression would not exist if it were not taught and subsequently internalized.

Interviewees often came back to shared usage of color-evasive language where they insisted that there were no differences between racial groups in terms of opportunity. Interviewees continually maintained statements of equality and neutrality between

marginalized and dominant groups. Jordan reflected on the opportunities afforded to families of different races, commenting:

I'm hearing it with a lot of, you know, families with different races, and they're like, No, they're saying that if you're Black, [...] you automatically don't have the same opportunities. And I don't believe that's true[...]. Like, I think we're all given the same opportunities. It's a matter of how we use our opportunities.

In this quotation, Jordan opposes the idea that a Black family does not inherently have the same opportunities as a white family. This displays direct parallels to the frame of abstract liberalism expressed in Bonilla-Silva's writing around the frames of colorblind racism. After the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many (largely white) people presume that Black people now have the exact same rights and opportunities (Bonilla-Silva 2003). In Jordan's quotation, she is largely reiterating the ideas of multiculturalism and color-evasive ideology; we are all equal, and everyone has the same opportunities in life. While legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects people of color from experiencing explicit discrimination based on race, it does not account for the years of social inequality, redlining, and de facto racism limiting the opportunities of Black communities.

These beliefs formed a significant component of the interviewee's reasoning of resistance to Critical Race Theory. Interviewees were ultimately concerned that through CRT, children of color would be told that they were incapable of achieving the same levels of success as white children and would begin to see their alleged oppression as an excuse for lower achievement. Interviewees largely believed that CRT taught children of color that they were less intelligent or capable than their white peers. Operating out of

color evasive ideology, interviewees reacted strongly to those allegations, believing that all children have the same opportunities and abilities. While well-intentioned, this mindset fails to take into account systemic barriers that may impact the success of children of color in a public school system designed for the needs of white children.

### *Infringement on Innocence*

Childhood is a critical period of social-emotional development. The lack of knowledge around many “serious” issues leads to the common idealization of childhood as a mythologized place of innocence and relative unawareness of the seriousness of the world. Emerging throughout the interview process was the emphasis from parents on protecting their children’s innocence. For many interviewees, they held beliefs that CRT contains heavy, damaging, shameful information about race relations that are not appropriate for children to learn. The framing of CRT then occupies the role of a threat to the innocence of their [largely white] children. Drawing once again on the writing of Frankenberg, children are often described as “too young” or too innocent to be tainted by racial prejudice. Their age, their lack of experience, and their innocence make them simply too young to be corrupted to be the ideas of racism (1993:146).

They're happy to be in school. They just want to play like, like, Hey, will you play with me? Not, Oh, you're white. And so I want to play with you. It's more of, will you play with me? And then just doing the different activities in school; it's so innocent.

In this quotation, Nicole is referencing her concern about discussing race with younger children, particularly those in early elementary school. Nicole refers to children’s discussions and interactions as playful and innocent and removed from experiences of



race and racism. When speaking to Nicole, she came back to this consistent idea of “just letting kids be kids.” The discussion of race and racism was portrayed as an infringement on children’s innocence. This goes back to Castagno’s work (2008), where race and racism are something that is to be silenced and inappropriate for discussions in school. This also portrays race and racism as something that is removed from the childhood experience. It depicts race and racism as something that can merely be opted in/out of, as opposed to a lived experience under systems of systemic racism.

In an interview with Annika, a mother to two children enrolled in Green Valley Public Schools, Annika expressed concern for the teaching of oppression taking away from the childhood experience.

When you tell kids that like the world is against them or was against them [...] you know, like, I feel like you take away the kids ability to [...] just be kids and just stumble across things. [...] I feel like, that's important. [...] I don't think that the school should be guiding kids. I think that kids should just [...] have like a wholesome environment.

Intriguingly, many of the respondents opposed to CRT either identified or associated CRT with other issues, including but not limited to bathroom usage of transgender students, enforcement of mask-wearing in schools/COVID-19 safety procedures, and Blue Lives Matter versus Black Lives Matter in the classroom setting.

During an interview with Renee, she noted that she easily got mixed up between the issue of Critical Race Theory and other adjoining issues.

I- you know, it's been so long and I was kind of backpedaling because I think it was probably more towards the L, the MLG I don't know all the LGB...Q, whatever that movement? more than Black lives or more than the critical race theory. [...] So I get all the issues they all [get] me. They help blend together in my mind, but not for you and your purposes.

In this quotation, Renee attempted to explain an issue with her son's middle school.

While retelling the anecdote, Renee realized that she mistook the issue of Critical Race Theory with her concerns with the implementation of an LGBTQ+-friendly curriculum in Sex Education. Renee quipped that they all blend in her head. To Renee, these issues were largely the same: an ever-growing and pressing threat to her children and their innocence, the mysterious unknown, and the new threats challenging current systems. Many respondents linked CRT to sex ed.

In an interview with Jordan, she often struggled to relate CRT back to race, instead often focusing on concerns over the teaching of sexually explicit material to children under the guise of sexual education.

The parts that were making me concerned [...] was when they're literally explaining you know, my son's in [middle school] at this time, [...] he's still, you know, very innocent, and they're explaining like homosexual sex and like how anal sex is safer sex and all of a sudden just like, wait a minute what? I'm like that's, that's not okay. Like, that's not what we should be talking about..

While largely outside the scope of this thesis research, it should be noted that concerns over sexually explicit content being taught to minors are a recurring fear that has emerged historically over the years, with similarly consistent rhetoric. A 1970 article written around community experiences to backlash against sex education in 1969 describes the oppositional arguments to Sex Ed as the following: “immoral, obscene, uses pornographic materials, and leads to and condones immoral experimentation and other behaviors; softens the nation's resistance to communism; undermines the family and the church; excites and seduces children; over emphasizes sex, particularly physical, ‘animalistic’ sex; invades privacy; and is based on situational ethics” (Kerckhoff 1970).

Jordan's fear that her son would be taught explicit sexual material, while not clearly displaying a direct connection to CRT, reveals a possible categorization of beliefs. The fear of explicit near pornographic sexual content being taught to young children holds implicit associations of deviance, immorality, promiscuity, and corruption of innocence, often through malicious intent. These implicit associations around the teaching of Sex Ed translate well over to the language used around CRT. CRT was both implicitly and explicitly described by interviewees as dangerous, corrupting, immoral, secretive, malicious, and presenting with a hidden agenda. The following quotations are from interviewees commenting about the teaching and acknowledgment of gender identity and sex ed in schools, with implicit parallels to the language used to discuss CRT:

Yes, and how they're bringing into [emphasis] "sexual" education, not gender education, not from a scientific perspective, but more of a personal feeling perspective. -Harper

It's more about people pushing their own agenda versus what you should actually teach the kids. - Nicole

You're taking away the parents right to have that conversation and to dig deeper into it and injecting in a kid's head who has not matured on any level yet. It's confusing them. And that's something that will come out eventually if that's the case, which is fine, but injecting that kind of thoughts into a child's head at a young age is not appropriate. -Adrian

[Kids] need to learn things at certain time, but I choose to preserve my children's innocence as long as I can in a healthy manner. [...] It's not their privilege to teach that to my child. [...] I choose to protect her innocence as long as I can. So she can just enjoy her childhood and not have all that extra weight and stress and things to think about. - Renee

Regarding transgender (trans) student bathroom usage and [preferred] pronoun usage,

respondents connected this issue to CRT through similar language around immorality and deviance. Renee explained her concerns about CRT entering in her son's advisory class:

But I just, I felt like so much garbage in, garbage out. So- so I guess it was- it was probably more towards- like you know... the LG...b, I don't know all the initials of it. You know, acceptance of that. But once that stuff started seeping in, and being pushed in different arenas, I just- I felt like it kind of opens up for everything else.

In an interview with Jordan, she reflected that she believed CRT was already being implemented in Green Valley School District. Jordan went on to discuss the relationship between trans issues and CRT, stating, “you know what I mean, like with the new genders and stuff like that. [It's] not just race. [...] I think it's kind of already being taught.” In addition, interviewees expressed sentiments that perceived issues around gender identities, such as trans bathroom usage<sup>7</sup> and pronouns<sup>8</sup>, are political issues that do not belong in schools. Many respondents indicated concern and feelings of protectiveness over their children being exposed to a political agenda in schools differing from their core values and beliefs. Central to this issue is the desire to merely “let kids be kids” and to allow for a mythologized experience of childhood racialized and gendered innocence.

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<sup>7</sup> Referring to students assigned at birth with a gender they do not identify with and later transition to living as their identified gender. These students often prefer to use the bathroom of their identified gender as opposed to their assigned gender, a topic that has caused much controversy, particularly in conservative media.

<sup>8</sup> While the usage of pronouns is often attributed to the transgender community, pronouns refer to the grammatical term in the English language; everyone uses pronouns; you or I are pronouns as well as she/her, he/him, they/them, etc.

In order to gain a better understanding of the core values of interviewees and to determine if there was a relationship between core values and views around CRT, all interviewees (with children) were asked what core values were important for their children to learn in school. When asked what core values were important to respondents for their children to learn in schools, respondents commonly pushed back, questioning what place the school has to teach values to its students:

“Why are they teaching values in school? Like, why aren't they just sitting with, you know, math, reading, you know what I mean? Like, why aren't they just keeping up the basics like why are there so many things that they're having to branch off with? [...] Why are we going so far into left field so quickly? Like, why can't like- teach the kids the facts [...] I don't think political views should be brought into anything.”

“Well, when I think of school, I think more of, you know, arithmetic and writing and those things. When it comes to values, I think the majority of that should be taught at home.”

“I think that the morals and values [should be taught only at a later age] - kids go to school for an education to gain skills for the future. [...] They shouldn't be getting skills outside of the future. It's the parent's responsibility.”

Interviewees who opposed CRT often expressed frustration or annoyance at this question. The idea of schools teaching values to students instead of solely standardized curricula was largely seen as unnecessary or even ridiculous. Respondents largely identified the place of values to be taught in the home by each household. The learning of values in a school setting was seen as a distraction and something that lacked importance when compared to other more traditional components of schooling.

Schools were often seen as an overwhelmingly neutral site, and respondents indicated they desired for K-12 school systems to teach core subjects exclusively, or as referred to by Joyce, a teacher, and grandmother in her mid 60's:

Now I'm saying I think it should be much more pure and [school is not the place for] CRT to be. [...] in its real definition, [CRT] has no place in high school, middle school or elementary school. What has [...] a place there is our real histories, real stories [...] and everything from astronauts, you know, the history of space to the history of science, the history of discovery, Magellan, and again, all of the migrations that happened and why they happen.

While Joyce's knowledge and understanding of Critical Race Theory greatly exceeded other interviewees in accuracy and depth, Joyce still had opposition to Critical Race Theory being taught in schools. Joyce considered Critical Race Theory to be entirely used in an upper-level, graduate legal studies context and found it to be too advanced or overly complicated to teach to children. Additionally, Joyce advocated for focusing on the "pure" aspects of school and learning, considering CRT to be difficult theoretically to understand and teach, as opposed to classical knowledge.

Respondents emphasized the need for a solid education based on standardized core subjects while often expressing confusion about the introduction of anything outside of this core view, often deemed unnecessary or politically motivated. The emphasis on "core education" around standardized topics points again to children being positioned as too young, too innocent, and inexperienced to understand topics around race and gender identity. These topics are deemed inappropriate for a school setting, while the "neutral" (math, science, language arts, history) topics are deemed acceptable for maintaining the innocence of the child. The parental resistance around schools teaching values to students

possibly incites concerns not only about a political agenda within schools but an agenda that can easily influence and “corrupt” the child outside of the home. The insistence from interviewees that the teaching and learning of values is a parental responsibility that should occur at home paints an image of fragility, the teaching of a value or lesson inconsistent with family values leading to new immorality. In the push against CRT, many opponents appear to have consciously or unconsciously grouped CRT with other social issues they deem as a threat to the innocence of their children. These infringements on the innocence of the child threaten the mentality of letting kids just be kids and the mythologized image of children as innocent, asexual, and uncorrupted by racial prejudice.

#### *Unnecessary Division and Harmful to Development*

During the interview process, respondents often came back to the idea that CRT was not only divisive but harmful to the social-emotional development of children. Interestingly but largely beyond the scope of this thesis, all of the respondents featured in the following section opposed the implementation of social-emotional learning in schools.

Interviewees frequently remarked that teaching CRT was creating or promoting segregation among children. Renee discusses this in the following quotation:

I think [CRT is] sending the wrong message. It's sending the wrong message to so many. It's a whole generation [that] it's gonna teach to think [...] sideways, [...] and it's gonna affect their futures, and how they treat other races, and they think it's so much better, but it's really [...] it's causing segregation.

Interestingly, Renee's use of thinking "sideways" largely encapsulates her unfamiliarity with CRT and race-cognizant curriculum. The assertion of race cognizance to not only recognize and acknowledge racial differences but to critically discuss systems of power and privilege is "sideways" from Renee's beliefs of color evasiveness. The claim that CRT causes segregation is rooted in the simple acknowledgment of the differences in the experience of different racial groups due to systemic injustice.

In an interview with Martha, a white mother, and grandmother in her 50's, Martha was perturbed by fears of repercussions to the healthy development of children allegedly posed by CRT:

I think because the children are still cognitively growing and developing, I think it would be detrimental to [...] healthy growth because I believe that their immaturity would cause them to like or dislike someone, because of their race, or trust, or distrust someone, because of their race. I want our children to learn to like or dislike someone because of their character, because of how they behave, how they act, how they treat others. That's what I want my child, my grandchildren to look at. [...].

Martha reflected that the teaching of CRT would be detrimental to the development of children and teach them to favor or disfavor others based on race. This is in direct opposition to Martha's beliefs in color evasive ideology, reminiscent of the often quoted section of MLK Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech, calling for those to judge based on the content of their character and not the color of their skin. Martha's statement reflects her belief that seeing race leads to subsequent racism.

Nicole additionally brought up the idea that CRT is divisive and harmful to children, alleging:



I think CRT is more of a divider and can actually [...] take away from the kid's experiences. At school where they should be learning the basics and thinking for themselves and should have been able to feel safe to share their perspective without being ridiculed or shamed by the teacher [...].

In this quotation, Nicole draws on the idea that CRT is something that detracts from children's learning and that kids should just go back to the basics of education. This statement reflects the idea that discussions of race is a private matter and inappropriate for discussion in schools. Race should not be seen or discussed, and it is only through the acknowledgment of race and oppression that racism is continually perpetuated.

Throughout the interview, Nicole expressed concerns that through the teaching of CRT, children would be shamed for their beliefs if they did not align with the beliefs of the teacher.

This concern was echoed by Harper:

I think it categorizes people more into if someone feels something, oh, you're racist. It's more of the pointing the finger, [...] if you have an opinion, now someone's pointing the finger at you, and you're like, Okay, I'm not racist, and then now it's a constant debate.

In Harper's interview, she repeatedly expressed concern for what she perceived as the policing of thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Harper believed that under the teaching of CRT if someone does not share the same [anti-racist, color cognizance] beliefs, they will be accused of being racist. Under this belief, Harper perceived a persecution of opinion. This sentiment that CRT forces everyone to share the same [anti-racist, color cognizance] beliefs, and if someone does not share those beliefs, they are isolated and called racist, was a commonly cited occurrence during the interview process. Ultimately,

these fears of being called racist proved incredibly powerful in shaping resistance to CRT.

Respondents largely believed that CRT would create division, both through the acknowledgment of racial differences and through the naming and calling out of racist beliefs and actions. As racism is largely perceived as a moral and character deficiency that only impacts “bad people”, many respondents disavowed the idea that they could be racist while simultaneously reflecting on their fears for their children and themselves being called racist.

Ultimately, respondents were fearful that their commitment to color-evasive ideology would create division between themselves and a new wave of color recognition that they ascribe as CRT. Respondents expressed concern that this division would be harmful to the social-emotional development of children, leading them to accuse others of being racist or to segregate themselves. Several parents interviewed were so fearful of this potential harm to the social-emotional development of their children that they had pulled their children into private or homeschooling, or were about to, in order to avoid so-called CRT curricula.

My interviews with parents and community members highlighted their concern for their children and grandchildren, as well as future generations. Interviewees were concerned that the teaching of CRT could have negative long-term impacts and lead to increased future racism. While coding, concern for children had by far, the highest number of codes (eighty six) in comparison to the other codes utilized. The idea of protecting children as a political talking point is a persuasive and powerful tool for

mobilizing communities. That said, why now? Why has the opposition to CRT thrived at such an extreme level? Could the timing of opposition of CRT be significant, both in the context of COVID-19 and the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement? The following section reviews and summarizes the data analysis conducted, and reflects on the possible relationship between changing dynamics and the opposition to CRT.

## DISCUSSION

This thesis explored the moral panic surrounding the opposition to CRT and K-12 education. Interviewees opposing Critical Race Theory cited their primary concern as their concern for children and the perceived harm perpetuated by CRT. Interviewees feared [white] children would be made to feel guilty or shameful for being white. Additionally, interviewees believed children of color being taught about their oppression would lead to them internalizing messages of inferiority and developing a victim complex. They accused Critical Race Theory of infringing on children's innocence by teaching allegedly inappropriate topics such as institutional racism and white privilege. Finally, interviews expressed concerns that the teaching of CRT created unnecessary division and was harmful to children's social emotional development.

Interviewees equated institutional racism and interpersonal racism, believing that discussing the systemic power of whiteness in oppression was equivalent to their children being held individually responsible for the legacy of racism. In addition, interviewees perceived learning about the history of racism and oppression to be largely irrelevant, if not ridiculous, as interviewees' construction of racism was largely embedded with “essentialist racism” - also known as old school, pre-civil rights era, de jure racism. Racism has been continuously equated as a flawed moral character; to be racist is to be “bad” and immoral. This association creates a strong resistance for many to accept their role in perpetuating systemic racism. In addition, the usage of a color-evasive mentality led interviewees to believe their white children were being unnecessarily shamed for their non-existent contribution to racism. Whiteness is consistently established as the

normative default, the unnamed, and the universalized. Interviewees expressed significant discomfort with the naming of whiteness established by Critical Race Theory.

Concern for children under the implementation of CRT was not limited to white children. Interviewees expressed their concern for children of color being taught that they were incapable of success and cultivating a “victim mentality.” Interviewees felt that teaching children of color about the history of oppression would lead to poorer life outcomes as children of color would see themselves as perpetual victims, incapable of success. Interviewees felt that merely not discussing the history of oppression would lead to children of color instead of growing up believing that they were capable of anything.

Critical Race Theory has been continually described as a danger to children. Whether described as more harmful to white children or children of color, many interviewees described it nonetheless as a corrupting force to children’s innocence. During periods of critical social-emotional development, learning about race and racism was deemed as inappropriate, divisive, and harmful to development. Interviewees often equated this to similar “cultural insanities” such as Black Lives Matter, transgender bathroom usage (using the bathroom of assigned sex versus identified gender), the inclusion of LGBT+ topics in the classroom, Social-emotional Learning (SEL), and comprehensive sexual education. Despite being largely unrelated, some interviewees believe these aforementioned to be under the umbrella of Critical Race Theory. Interviewees largely used similar language around these topics to describe the immorality and corrupting forces. Interviewees overwhelmingly perceived the school as neutral sites,

intended primarily for the “core subjects” of education (math, science, history<sup>9</sup>, language arts) with no place for these controversial topics that threatened the innocence of their children.

While opponents of CRT expressed strong opposition to social-emotional education, they asserted that CRT was divisive and subsequently harmful to the social-emotional development of children. Opponents of CRT believed CRT would detract from children’s school experience and encourage segregation and division. Interviewees believed the acknowledgment of racial differences would lead to children favoring or disfavoring others based on their race. Interviewees were ultimately afraid that a new wave of color recognition would create division with their commitment to color-evasive ideology.

White emotionalities have weaponized the opposition against CRT. The alleged guilt, discomfort, and shame experienced by white children over confronting their privilege have played a sizable role in conservative news media and in shaping legislation censoring the acknowledgment of white privilege and systemic racism. Notably, we have not leaped to the same levels to create safe environments for children of non-white backgrounds experiencing discomfort and shame in the classroom.

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<sup>9</sup> While respondents often described history as a core subject that is essential for education, this poses an interesting contradiction as only certain topics are deemed acceptable or neutral while others are deemed too political and controversial to be taught.

### *Contextualizing opposition to CRT in the context of COVID-19*

When it comes to children of color, discomfort and shame is a normalized part of the classroom experience. Indigenous children have continually faced both classmates and educators mocking their culture, depicting racist tellings of Indigenous history, and even cutting off their hair (Mosley 2022; Lee 2023; Lakritz 2021). Latinx students have been harassed with threats of deportation and described as lazy and aimless (Bermudez 2017). Middle Eastern students have continually been faced with hateful classmates and educators accusing them of terrorism (Li 2021). Black students have been violently harassed with references to enslavement and some have been forced to re-enact enslavement as part of a history lesson (De Nova 2023; Teh 2022; Cooper 2023; DuBose and Nelson 2023). Despite these incredibly racist and harmful incidents, we have not seen the wide sweeping legislation and nationwide conversations over protecting the innocence and emotional state of children of color in the classroom. The opposition to Critical Race Theory is centrally linked to the emotionalities of white children and parents. While opponents have utilized concern for children of color to embolden arguments, the central motivations have always revolved around the protection of white children. The racialized components of CRT opposition are undeniable.

As a country, we have had copious opportunities to come to the aid to protect children of color from threats to their innocence and of racial shame. Yet, we have only mobilized on a massive, nationwide scale in the interest of protecting the innocence and emotionalities of white children. The concerns over changing curricula posing a threat to the innocence of [white] children may indicate growing concerns over the real or

perceived loss of autonomy as a parental figure and shifting racial dynamics – both in and outside the classroom. These interviews were conducted from October 2021 through January 2022, a period in the center of the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, Green Valley schools had slowly begun resuming in-person schooling for students. Resuming in-person schooling meant the requirement of mask-wearing and prohibitions on visitors in the classroom in the interest of safety from COVID-19. These safety precautions created a temporary suspension of parent and family volunteers involved in the classroom. After spending a year and a half in online schooling, parents felt uninvolved, disconnected, and isolated from their children’s classrooms. They were again missing the opportunity to get involved with their child's education.

The parental disconnect from the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic generated a discussion void that fed the spread of disinformation. This disconnect was not limited just to the classroom, but an overall increase in social isolation and small social circles. This lack of connection left many parents increasingly susceptible to far right conspiracy theories and disinformation.

The simultaneous occurrence of the 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests across the United States should also be considered when considering this period of transition. The widespread movement in the fight for racial justice launched terms such as systemic racism, white privilege, and yes, critical race theory into the spotlight. For many white interviewees whom I spoke to, this was one of the few times in their life they were directly confronted with information on racial inequity and systemic racism. Many of the respondents chose to distance themselves from possible feelings of shame and guilt by



minimizing or denying the significance of racial inequity, in favor of a color-evasive mentality. The influx of discussion around racial justice and equity proved overwhelming for many white Americans who were not prepared for the shifting of racial power dynamics. Suddenly, the universalized and unnamed experience of whiteness was being labeled and visualized. Many interviewees expressed discomfort over being confronted with their whiteness. For those who opposed the 2020 Black Lives Matter Movement (which included the majority of my interviewees), many consumed content on social media or on conservative news media spreading disinformation about the harms of Black Lives Matter. This disinformation validated their beliefs of color-evasiveness, suggesting that it was in fact Black Lives Matter protesters who were violently racist, and not “seeing color” (and thus leaving whiteness unchallenged) was the only valid response to racial relations and conflict.

During this time, calls issued by Black Lives Matter protesters for the teaching of historically accurate information on race and enslavement became widespread. Conservative disinformation distorted these calls for racial equity and liberation to instead be allegedly focused on the shaming of whiteness. Growing racial tensions, lack of connection, community relationships, and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be significant factors in spreading this disinformation.

Parents previously involved in their child’s school with an active relationship with their children’s educators suddenly lost that connection to their child’s education. When concerning information emerged online about their child’s curricula, parents no longer had the easily accessible and established relationship with their children’s teachers to turn

to. Instead, parents vented their frustration online without reliable fact checking. Many parents felt isolated or unaware of what their child was learning, adding to the belief that their child's school would make drastic decisions around the changing of curricula, and inadvertently become more susceptible to the disinformation spread through conservative news media. During this pandemic time when anything and everything changed overnight, it was much easier to believe school districts would quickly implement unprecedented curricula attributed to CRT. CRT was used as a catalyst for parents unhappy with increasingly progressive changes in school curricula. Many interviewees even connected CRT to COVID-19 safety precautions and mask wearing, although they struggled to explain the exact connection. Much like Christopher Rufo intended with decodifying CRT in order for it to be associated with various “cultural insanities”, CRT was scapegoated as a leftist ideology bringing destruction into schools across the country.

Consistently, throughout the interview process, interviewees expressed embarrassment at being unable to clearly define or explain what CRT really meant. While all interviewees agreed to participate in an interview based on flyers explicitly recruiting participants to discuss their opinions on CRT in schools, only two out of the thirteen interviewees correctly defined CRT, and of those two, only one interviewee considered themselves to understand the definition they shared. Not only did interviewees struggle to understand what CRT was, but they also struggled to understand what was actually happening around CRT on a policy level. Interviewees were often unclear if schools were actually teaching CRT or what curricula using CRT would look like, often relying on

anecdotal evidence from social media or conservative news media to describe alleged curricula.

Since a majority of schools are not teaching students about CRT, there are no examples or model curricula for parents to reference. Instead, conservative news media fills this role by taking school assignments out of context and labeling them as CRT and (allegedly) emblematic of the hidden agenda of the public school system. The strong backlash that has been incited over CRT has turned CRT into a hot-button term that many have turned to avoid using. Less than twelve hours after posting my first recruitment flier online, I was contacted by a school administrator in rural northwestern Washington who expressed concern that my research would be harmful and create unnecessary violence and threats to the school board. The administrator mentioned that my research might lead community members to the incorrect assumption that the school district was preparing to teach CRT. During the recruitment process of my research, I received strongly worded comments from those from across the political spectrum. Most interestingly, I received backlash from parents and community members who were strongly in favor of more diverse, culturally relevant curricula. While these parents and community members supported increasingly diverse curricula, they were strongly opposed to my usage of the term “critical race theory informed curricula,” stressing that the curricula they were pushing for were not and should not be equated with Critical Race Theory. In this situation, the mere usage of the term CRT in a hypothetical sense was enough to strike the fear of creating an outsized reaction and creating regression in progressive education. Throughout this research process, I routinely encountered well-meaning, left-leaning

people who suggested simply not using the term CRT and instead looking to other terms. Could it be as simple as we disguise CRT under another term? We have an excellent opportunity to learn from the opposition to Critical Race Theory, to understand barriers keeping us from achieving historically accurate teachings of race. More importantly, how do we overcome those barriers?

## IMPLICATIONS

In the process of culminating my thesis, I have identified several barriers to achieving historically accurate teachings of race that have been presented or exposed by recent hysteria around Critical Race Theory. First, the purposeful introduction of CRT to the broader public based on disinformation has created largely inaccurate and dangerous associations with CRT. Second, it has led to significant threats to educators (of all levels) and academic freedom over the increase in censorship. Third, CRT challenges color evasive ideology.

In response to these barriers, I have also determined several approaches for addressing the pushback against CRT: critical media literacy, the centering of families and children of color, reframing schools as political spaces, and the “doubling down” approach to embracing Critical Race Theory.

### *Barriers to Historically Accurate Teachings of Race*

#### *I. - The disinformation of CRT.*

Conservative narratives around the dangers of CRT have run rampant and infiltrated the minds and homes of fearful conservatives across the country. The perceived threat of Critical Race Theory targeting current systems of power and color-evasive understandings of race has created a moral panic among conservatives. Despite the flames of fear stoked by FOX News, CRT is not being taught in the K-12 classroom. CRT has been used to develop pedagogical strategies and influence educational research, but CRT is not being introduced as a theoretical framework for classroom instruction. Since there is no larger group or effort pushing CRT into classrooms, this has ultimately

given opponents of CRT more power over the narrative of CRT. Conservative activists, politicians, and media have created sensationalist headlines, warned of near-dystopian futures at the hands of CRT, and stripped innocuous terminology to be represented instead as threatening and destructive.

There is no pro-CRT narrative being pushed. Instead, there is a false narrative constructed by opponents of CRT who have created a folk devil (Cohen 2011) describing the alleged (non-existent) pro-CRT narrative through exaggeration, misrepresentation, and sensationalism. Opponents of CRT have shaped not only the narrative of resistance to CRT but also the alleged narrative of the push for CRT. This incredibly influential position has heavily created a folk devil out of CRT to facilitate the spread of disinformation, muddling the understanding of CRT for those across the political spectrum.

## *II. - Censorship and academic freedom threatened.*

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant barriers to achieving liberatory education is the concerningly widespread legislation spreading across the United States. Forty-two states have attempted legislation, and seventeen states have passed legislation related to banning Critical Race Theory, institutional racism, white privilege, etc. in K12 schools or government trainings (Schwartz 2022). As discussed in the literature review, legislation banning CRT poses a substantial threat to Academic Freedom. While university-level professors have academic freedom (hypothetically) protected by the first amendment, K-12 educators do not have the same level of protection (Walsh 2021). The normalization of the censorship of K-12 educators sets a concerning standard for

educators at every level. The prohibition of the discussion of CRT has created a cultural taboo implying CRT is inherently controversial, divisive, or dangerous.

*III. - CRT challenges color evasiveness.*

The core components of CRT center around acknowledging racism is not rare and in fact a common occurrence, and that color evasiveness (colorblindness) is nonsensical, dangerous, and reinforces systems of oppression. CRT directly challenges color evasiveness. A theoretical framework cannot exist that includes color evasiveness and CRT. For CRT to be utilized, it requires the disavowing of color evasive ideology and commitment to color recognizance. For many who have grown up in the post-civil rights era and raised with “multicultural” ideals, renouncing color evasiveness requires a full re-evaluation of core values and beliefs. Renouncing color evasiveness requires an acknowledgement of systematic racism, and the power of whiteness in systems of oppression. For many, acknowledging the power of whiteness also comes with the painful realization of facing accountability for contributing to systemic racism.

*Strategies Towards Historically Accurate Teachings of Race*

*I. - Critical media literacy.*

Many respondents argued against Critical Race Theory by citing misleading or dangerously false information. These arguments were easily refuted through a few Google searches and cross-referencing sources. While respondents repeatedly emphasized, they tried to avoid sourcing their news from social media and tried to consume news from a “moderate” and balanced perspective, they were (unknowingly) consuming and reiterating false information about Critical Race Theory. What would it

look like if the critical thinking skills taught to students emphasized critiquing our sources of information? What would it look like if students were taught from a young age to challenge what is a reliable source of information and the possible motivations of a source? Furthermore, what would it look like if we held our family, friends, and community members accountable for the information they share? If we asked critical questions and utilized our close community relationships to encourage media literacy at every stage of life.

## *II. - Centering of children and families of color.*

When discussing opposition to Critical Race Theory, there is both implicit and explicit messaging: Critical Race Theory is harmful to white children. This underlying message highlights systems of white supremacy by emphasizing that the discussion of race and inequality poses a systemic threat to power structures. In the efforts to overcome these barriers to historically accurate teachings on race, we must remember not to center white children by focusing entirely on how to evade white outrage. We must remember to prioritize the needs of the most marginalized – families and children of color, who are impacted disproportionately through restrictions on anti-racist education. When fighting the backlash to Critical Race Theory, we must remember to act from a place that not just fights the opposition to CRT but vehemently emphasizes the importance of teaching historically accurate information on race, for our most marginalized and vulnerable students.



### *III. - Reframing of schools as political spaces.*

Opponents to Critical Race Theory often argue school is not the place to discuss race and ethnicity – school is not the place to discuss injustice or any form of “political issues.” We must acknowledge that schools are not, nor have they ever been politically neutral sites. Implementing the public school system as free, accessible, and mandatory for every child in the United States is political. Schools are not sites of neutrality, as the educators, administrators, and students who occupy these spaces are not blank slates. Each educator, administrator, and student in these spaces bring their background knowledge and cultural experiences. While schools have the opportunity to be incredible sites of transformation, they are not objective sites of knowledge. Nor should we aspire for schools to be objective and neutral spaces. Schools are subjective learning places and explicitly modeled from our current political climate. What would it look like if we viewed the inherent politicization of school not as a weakness but as a strength? What would it look like if we acknowledged schools as political spaces that encouraged students to engage in critical thinking, civil engagement and act as community members?

### *IV. - “Doubling down”.*

During the process of presenting and explaining my research, I have consistently received the inquiry, “what if we just don’t say CRT? What if there’s another word we can use instead?” While well intentioned, the avoidance and sidestepping of the term CRT ultimately concedes to conservative pressures. The decision to avoid the word CRT solidifies the framing of CRT as something that is controversial, immoral, and deviant. Critical Race Theory is a well-respected theoretical framework in academia. Many

publications have been written utilizing CRT as a framework, for over forty years. In an academic context, CRT is not a controversial term to be avoided. It is an accepted, established part of academia. There is nothing immoral, deviant, or inherently controversial about Critical Race Theory. So, why should we treat CRT as if it is?

Many of the interviewees expressed suspicions that schools were trying to sneak CRT into the curriculum under the guise of calling it diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), social-emotional learning (SEL), comprehensive sex ed, and culturally responsive teaching<sup>10</sup>. As cultivated by Christopher Rufo<sup>11</sup> (2021), Critical Race Theory has been decodified from the original context and recodified to describe “cultural insanities” unpopular with [largely conservative] Americans. To summarize, it simply does not matter what term is used to describe diverse, historically accurate curricula; it is all under attack. The recodified, politicized CRT is used as an umbrella term for perceived progressive curricula. This attack does not end when we change the terminology.

Legislation banning historically accurate depictions of race, racism, and oppression from being taught emboldens the depiction of CRT as dangerous to children. Teachers and school administrators (across the political spectrum) issuing statements and assurance to the community that they have not now nor ever taught CRT solidifies CRT as a threat. We cannot properly address the attacks on CRT while providing assurances

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<sup>10</sup> Culturally responsive teaching is often abbreviated to CRT. For clarity, I have not abbreviated culturally responsive teaching and instead written it out in full. While culturally responsive teaching and CRT have some overlap, they do not refer to the same practice, despite the same abbreviation.

<sup>11</sup> Rufo’s relationship to the push against CRT is covered in the introduction of this thesis.a

that CRT will not be, is not, and has never been taught. This is when Mayorga and Bradley (2023:136) introduce the idea of “doubling down” on Critical Race Theory. Instead of practicing avoidance out of fear, we should instead deeply familiarize ourselves with and embrace Critical Race Theory. Mayorga and Bradley call for the rooting of our practices in Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Praxis (Yamamoto 1997) in all parts of our work. While Mayorga and Bradley (2023) issue this call to themselves, as educators this call is applicable to any person, in nearly any context or field who wants to push back against opposition to CRT. Instead of avoiding engaging with historically accurate tellings of race out of fear, we should instead familiarize ourselves with the core components of CRT and integrate it into practice. Critical Race Theory can offer in-depth critical insight and inquiry into any field or practice. Critical Race Theory has the opportunity to be normalized across contexts and fields as a part of critical inquiry.

#### *Future Research*

Due to the time constraints of the research project conducted as part of a Master’s Thesis, the sample size of the participants was limited. Future research conducted should aim to replicate research in different geographic locations in the United States. Only two participants of this research were identified as being from non-white backgrounds. Additional recruitment and analysis of interviewees from varying non-white backgrounds may provide critical insight into those resisting CRT from other positionalities. Additionally, research on the backlash to Critical Race Theory is a recent but rapidly expanding field of research spanning fields such as sociology, ethnic studies, and

educational research. Prior research has largely examined the backlash to CRT by focusing on (both passed and proposed) legislation. Future research should be expanded to examine the relationship between the spread of disinformation on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook in the pushback against CRT. Lastly, the impact on children and families of color has been noted but is still a largely ignored section of this research. Future research on the impacts of race-related censorship laws on children of color is an area of much-needed study.

## CONCLUSION

As legislation banning Critical Race Theory and historically accurate teaching on race continues to pass, the threat of censorship and retaliation for the teaching of the history of systemic racism mounts. The banning of CRT is in grave danger of normalizing retaliation for educators at all levels accurately teaching about race. Prior research has explored proposed and passed legislation and implications for educators. Until now, no in-depth qualitative research has been conducted on the opponents of CRT. This research has shown strong internalization and regurgitation of the anti-CRT narratives pushed by conservative news media. While anecdotal speculation has occurred that opponents of CRT do not understand what CRT is, this research has showcased a strong lack of understanding of the definition and core components of CRT. Additionally, this research has both affirmed and expanded on anecdotal speculation that opponents of CRT are motivated by their desire to protect the innocence of white children.

While prior literature on critical whiteness and color evasiveness is expansive, limited literature on opponents of CRT has focused on the theoretical analysis of color evasiveness in guiding white opposition. I argue that alleged concern for children under the framework of color evasiveness is central to shaping the moral panic around Critical Race Theory. Opponents have argued their concern for white children, children of color, the threat to the innocence of children, and the divisiveness presented by CRT. All of these arguments are deeply embedded in color-evasive ideology.

Opponents of Critical Race Theory share a commitment to color-evasive ideology. This color-evasive ideology has centered on whiteness as the default.

Opponents of CRT not only have a commitment to color-evasive ideology but a commitment to maintaining the structural oppression of whiteness. Whiteness, as an ideology, has shaped the resistance to Critical Race Theory both in narrative and emotion. We cannot discuss opposition to Critical Race Theory without the underlying components: Critical Race Theory is a betrayal to color evasive ideology and whiteness. Critical Race Theory disavows whiteness as an ideology, the presumed default state of “neutrality” for many. white emotionalities have reacted strongly to this disruption of core values and beliefs.

To disavow whiteness as an ideology is to challenge core beliefs and conceptions of self and society. Color-evasive ideology allows for the maintenance of structural systems of oppression. Color evasive ideology turns away from acknowledging the significance of systemic racism and the role whiteness has in perpetuating harm. The opposition to Critical Race Theory has been shaped by white emotionalities in response to the challenge of color-evasive ideology. To maintain color-evasive ideology is to embrace structural systems of oppression. To challenge color evasive ideology and to embrace Critical Race Theory is to combat the destructive power of whiteness and welcome historically accurate teachings on race.

While the threats of censorship and limitations to academic freedom loom, we must remember this opposition has largely occurred because of the immense amount of progress made through historically accurate teachings on race. Educators across the country are welcoming an honest dialogue on historically accurate teachings on race. After years of essentialist racism and color-evasive ideology disguised under the name of

multiculturalism, many schools are finally listening to the needs of current and future generations. All students have a right to a historically accurate, diverse, equitable, and inclusive education. To combat resistance to CRT, we must go beyond surface-level support. We must proudly and loudly support all those who “double down” – the educators, librarians, and school board members across the country fighting for the current and future generations' right to historically accurate teachings on race.

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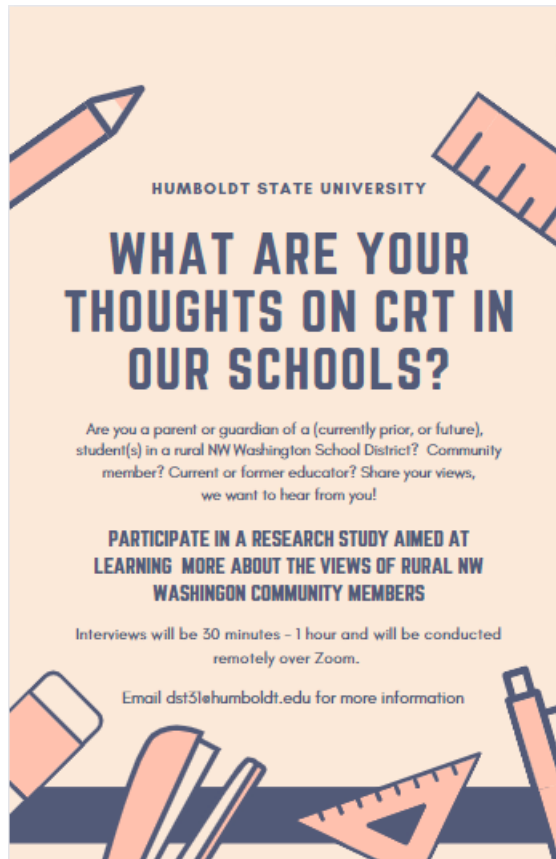
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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A – Interview Recruitment, Consent, and Participation*

#### Appendix A1 – Digital Flyer for Recruitment





## Appendix A2 – Interviewee Consent Form

### **Research Participation Informed Consent Form**

*All interviews will be conducted remotely over Zoom*

#### *Cal Poly Humboldt – Parent and Community Perspectives on Critical Race Theory-Informed Curriculum*

You are invited to participate in a 30–90-minute interview over Zoom about the prospective implementation of ethnic studies and critical race theory-informed curriculum in Northwestern WA. The purpose of this interview is to collect qualitative data from the perspective of local parents/guardians as well as local community members.

My name is Daniela Tierra. I am a graduate student in Public Sociology at Cal Poly Humboldt. I am conducting this study as a part of my M.A. thesis, and I will be facilitating your interview.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer any or all questions you do not wish to answer. You may discontinue your participation in the interview at any point without any negative consequences.

There are minimal risks to participation in this research study. The most significant risk to participants is potential discomfort around the topics (such as discussion of race in schools) that will be covered in the interview.

To ensure the confidentiality of your identity, I will be using a pseudonym in the place of your name. You may choose the pseudonym (if you wish), or you will be randomly assigned a pseudonym. To protect your identity, any information that may easily identify you will not be included in the final paper and will be redacted from any transcripts produced of the interview. Individual quotations from your interview will be recorded and may be used in the final paper. Any quotes used will be attributed to your pseudonym.

You have the right to decline the use of your quotations to be used in the final paper. This research study will be as part of a graduate thesis and may be presented outside the university (such as at an academic conference). The findings of this study may also be shared via publication.

To accurately represent your words, I will be taking written notes and digitally recording the interview. A transcript will be generated from the digital recording and reference any information discussed to complete comprehensive notes.

Your interview will be digitally recorded on a cell phone and password protected. Within one week of your interview, the digital recording will be uploaded to a computer and deleted off the cell phone. Within one month of your interview, the digital recording will be fully transcribed. After the transcription has been completed, the digital recording will be permanently deleted. The full copy of the transcription will be stored for up to five years after the completion of the interview. After those five years, the transcription will be permanently destroyed.

Within 7 days of receiving email confirmation of consent, I will upload an electronic copy of the thread to a secure cloud storage location, separate from the data. Afterward, the original email thread will be deleted.

The electronic copy of the email thread will be password protected and stored in a separate digital file that does not include the interview transcription or digital recording. The electronic copy of consent will be stored for the same time as the transcription and will also be permanently destroyed.

Dr. Stefanie Israel de Souza, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Cal Poly Humboldt, is supervising this research project. Any questions, concerns, or clarifications related to this research project can be directed towards Dr. Israel de Souza ([sei14@humboldt.edu](mailto:sei14@humboldt.edu)) or myself, Daniela Tierra ([dst31@humboldt.edu](mailto:dst31@humboldt.edu)).

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects via phone at (707) 826-5165 or via email at [irb@humboldt.edu](mailto:irb@humboldt.edu).

Replying to this email with acknowledgement of having read and understand the email indicates that you are over the age of 18, have read this form in full, understand the potential risks included in your participation, are willing to participate, and understand that your participation is voluntary and that you may stop at any point without any negative consequence.

If you consent to participation in this research study, please respond to this email with (1) your full name, (2) stating that you have read this form and (3) consent to participation, (4) as well as answering yes or no to the question listed below.

*Do you consent to including individual quotations (attributed to your pseudonym) in this research project?*

1. Yes, I consent to the use of quotations from my interview in the culminating paper from this research project.
2. No, I do not consent to including and using my quotations from my interview in the culminating research paper from this research project.

## Appendix A3 – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

*Disclaimer: These are examples of questions that may be asked during the interview process. Additional follow-up questions may be asked (as necessary), and slight modifications to the order of the questions and the wording may occur. There will be no significant alteration of the topic or questions presented below between ascertaining IRB approval and conducting the interviews. All interviews for this research project will be conducted over Zoom.*

### ***Symbol guide***

*C = Contextual question*

*D = Demographic question*

*K = Key question*

### **Assessment of Parent/Guardian Response to CRT in (rural) Western Washington Schools**

1. How many children (if any) do you currently have enrolled in the [x] district? **(D)**
2. What grade are your children currently attending? **(D)**
  - a. How long have your children been enrolled in this district? Have they ever attended school in another district? Where?
  - b. How long have you resided in the area? Where were you located prior to living here?
3. How often do you check the news (newspaper, social media, tv)? **(C)**
  - a. What types of news media do you check?
4. How much of your news would you estimate that you get from social media? **(C)**
  - a. A large amount, some amount, a little bit, none?
  - b. What types of social media do you get news from?

5. What people in your life do you consider to be trustworthy sources when sharing local or national news? **(C)**
  - a. What is your relationship with them? What role do they play in your life?
6. How would you describe your political leanings?
7. How informed do you consider yourself to be about education news and policy in WA public schools? **(C)**
8. Recently, there have been discussions about potentially implementing Critical Race Theory informed curriculum into public schools across the country. Are you familiar with the recent controversy around the implementation of Critical Race Theory in public school classrooms?
  - a. If so, when and how did you hear about it? **(K)**
  - b. If you heard about it from the news - do you remember from what media outlet you heard that? What media outlets do you regularly follow?
9. Could you give me a definition of CRT? Can you describe CRT to me as you understand it? **(K)**
  - a. If your student asked you what CRT is, how would you explain it?
  - b. When you think of CRT, what words come to mind?
10. How did you learn about CRT? **(K)**
11. If CRT was implemented in schools, what do you think the impact would be? **(K)**
  - a. What about on a national level? What about on a local level? Would it have an impact on your family?
12. What are your thoughts about race being taught in schools? **(C)**
13. What is the appropriate age to talk to kids about race?

14. How would you describe your involvement in your child's education? **(C)**
15. Can you share with me a scenario where you would be moved to contact an administrator based on the curriculum taught in your student's school? **(K)**
16. Is there a situation that you could imagine transferring your children to a new school because of the curriculum taught? **(C)**
  - a. If so, what would that situation look like?
17. What social values are important (to you) for your student to be taught in school? Why? **(K)**
18. What is one thing you like about the school your student attends? **(C)**
19. What is one thing you dislike about the school your student attends?
20. How familiar are you with the curriculum taught in your student's school? **(C)**
21. How often do you discuss (with your student) what your student learns in school? **(C)**
22. How often do you help your student(s) with their homework? **(C)**
23. Is there anything you would like to talk about that I didn't ask? **(K)**
24. Is there anyone you think I should talk to? Do you have their contact information? **(K)**

Why do you think they would be a good person for me to talk to for this study? **(K)**

*Appendix B – List of Codes*

Table 1 - Lists of codes and occurrences (grounded) via Atlas.ti

<b>Code</b>	<b>Grounded</b>
○ Agenda in schools	27
○ Anecdotal story	6
○ Anti-communism/red scare rhetoric	10
○ BBC mention	3
○ Casual Homophobia	12
○ Christianity mention	14
○ CNN mention	5
○ Colorblind language	44
○ Community Observations	36
○ Concern for children	85
○ Concern for sex ed	21
○ confusion	23
○ Core Values	65
○ COVID mention	3
○ CRT as dangerous	4
○ CRT as division	31
○ CRT opinions	75
○ Demographics	51
○ Diversity Flex	5
○ Doing too much	10
○ Educational Involvement	78
○ equality emphasis	5
○ everything is politicized	15
○ Favoring whiteness	3
○ FOX news mention	10
○ Geographic location	22
○ Historic Parallel	14
○ Holy Trifecta	7
○ How race should be taught	58
○ Innocence	11
○ King 5 mention	1
○ KIRO mention	5
○ Knowledge of CRT	52
○ Local news mention	6
○ Media sources	52
○ Moderate emphasis	58

<b>Code</b>	<b>Grounded</b>
○ MSNBC mention	3
○ Political leanings	52
○ Possible misinformation	8
○ Possibly coded language	15
○ Potential anti-Black connotations	20
○ Race mention	90
○ Social media	17
○ Talk show mention	1
○ Teaching about culture is okay BUT	7
○ Teaching Oppression is limiting	14
○ Trustworthy people	25
○ Value pushback	4
○ Victim mentality mention	12
○ When they heard about CRT	5
○ White guilt	11
○ White Privilege	8
○ White Saviorism Concerns	6

Appendix C – IRB Approval of Research



**MEMORANDUM**

**Date:** 9/28/2021  
**To:** Stefanie E Israel de Souza  
Daniela Tierra  
**From:** Susan Brater  
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
**IRB #:** IRB 21-024  
**Subject:** Parent Views of Critical Race Theory in K-12 Education

Thank you for submitting your application to the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. After reviewing your proposal I have determined that your research can be categorized as Exempt by Federal Regulation 45 CFR 46.104(d) because of the following:

*Your research will only include interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information is recorded in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained; (ii) Disclosure of the subjects' responses outside the research would not place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the identity of the subjects can be ascertained, and the IRB conducts a limited review.*

The anniversary date of this proposal is **9/28/2022**. By HSU policy, all data collection related to this protocol must stop on the anniversary date, unless a renewal/annual report is submitted. In order to prevent any interruption in your research, please submit a renewal/annual report in time for the IRB to process, review, and extend the Exempt designation (at least one month).

**Important Notes:**

- Any alterations to your research plan must be reviewed and designated as Exempt by the IRB prior to implementation.
  - Change to survey questions
  - Number of subjects
  - Location of data collection,
  - Any other pertinent information
- If Exempt designation is not extended prior to the anniversary date, investigators must stop all data collection related to this proposal.
- Any adverse events or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately to the IRB ([irb@humboldt.edu](mailto:irb@humboldt.edu)).

cc: Faculty Adviser (if applicable)  
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

**The California State University**

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