

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME I

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CRT's usefulness will be limited not by the weakness of its constructs but by the degree that many whites will not accept its assumptions; I anticipate critique from both left and right.

(Taylor, 1998, p. 124)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is one of the fastest growing and most controversial fields of contemporary social theory, and education is the discipline where its most dynamic and challenging work is taking place. CRT proposes an analysis of society as being based on systemic, deep-rooted racist oppression that saturates common-sense understandings and tradition to such an extent that all but the most extreme racism appears normal and unexceptional; what Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic – two of the leading figures in legal CRT – describe as “the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day” (2000, p. xvi). In this way CRT offers a shocking and often contentious perspective that contradicts the mainstream view of racism as a relatively rare phenomenon that is only perpetrated by extremists on the fringes of society.

From its first iterations in the 1970s and 1980s, as part of radical US legal scholarship, CRT has grown into a multi-disciplinary movement that is taken up and used by scholars and activists internationally. A paper by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate IV (1995 – reproduced as the first chapter in this collection) is generally regarded as the moment when CRT formally entered the field of Educational Studies. Since then the approach has grown rapidly in popularity and expanded in new and important ways. Ladson-Billings and Tate first presented their working ideas at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in 1994; 20 years later, at the Association's 2014 meeting, CRT was one of the most popular themes, linked to 66 separate sessions (putting it easily within the top 20 percent of listed specialisms).

Despite its growth in reach and popularity, however, CRT remains highly contested and, as Edward Taylor predicted in an early primer on the approach (quoted above), the attacks originate “from both left and right” (1998, p. 124). Conservative commentators typically argue that any attention to race risks incitement to pessimism – even violence – and threatens the meritocratic ideals that they believe are already enshrined in practice. Their outrage reaches new heights when they realize that CRT views the very notion of meritocracy itself (and

equally sacrosanct ideals such as objectivity and neutrality) as mechanisms that act to defend and camouflage the vested interests of White elites. In addition, as Ladson-Billings (2013 – in this volume) has noted, from the very first public outing for CRT in education, “friendly fire” has been a constant presence as the approach draws the ire of erstwhile progressives who publicly avow their commitment to advancing equity but object to CRT’s bold decision to put race and racism at the forefront of the analysis.

This collection: canonical and cutting edge

The four volumes that make up this collection provide a unique mini-library that encompasses some of the very best CRT scholarship in education. As is characteristic of the Routledge Major Works series, the collection’s hallmark is a combination of canonical and cutting-edge work: every paper is either an established “classic” or significantly challenges and advances thinking on key issues.

The editorial team consisted of six scholars (three each from the US and the UK) and, mirroring the diversity of positionality that is characteristic of the movement itself, the team is predominantly made up of scholars of color.

At the beginning of the editorial process, which stretched over two years, we contacted almost 40 colleagues internationally who have contributed important work in the field. We explained our task and invited them to suggest key pieces that they would like to see in such a collection. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with many seeing the collection itself as an important step forward for CRT in education. We received detailed feedback and suggestions from around a third of the people that we contacted. Their ideas were circulated between the editorial team and four members each assumed the lead role for one of the volumes; they constructed an initial list of contributions which was then shared across the team in order to generate further discussion. Slowly an initial “longlist” of contributions emerged.

As an editorial team our overall aim was to craft a collection that represented the most important themes in educational CRT while also doing justice to the breadth and depth of relevant research. In order to fully explore certain themes, we included a few papers where the author does not self-consciously identify as a critical race theorist but where their ideas build on, and feed into, relevant CRT research. We have also included some legal CRT: this reflects the historic importance of the movement’s roots in legal scholarship and, looking ahead, testifies to the continued significance of legal studies in providing some of the most insightful CRT scholarship. The editorial team have each drawn on legal CRT in their own research and we are convinced of the benefits that can be drawn from continued conversations and cross-fertilization between the disciplines of law and education; each of the four volumes includes at least one piece from a law review.

Of course, no single collection can be exhaustive. Initially a total budget of around 1,500 pages sounds like a lot, but space quickly becomes scarce once a six-person editorial team starts to collate the pieces that each of them thinks is

important. Some papers had to be sacrificed because there simply was not enough space for everything we initially wanted to include. In addition, there are numerous practical reasons why some pieces could not be included; one author preferred not to have their work reprinted, while the charges levied by publishers and/or learned societies (which control copyright on certain pieces) were sometimes beyond our resources. Nevertheless, we believe that the collection brings together a selection that is unparalleled in its overall range and quality.

A guide to Volume I: tenets, tools and signature concepts

... there is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which we all subscribe. Although Critical Race scholarship differs in object, argument, accent, and emphasis, it is nevertheless unified by two common interests. The first is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained.... The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to *change* it.

(Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii, original emphasis)

This short quotation, from one of the most cited pieces of CRT scholarship ever published, is extremely important. As we have noted, in the decades that have passed since these words were written, CRT has grown into an international interdisciplinary movement. Critical whiteness studies have emerged as an important and growing field, where CRT continues to make a distinctive and hugely influential contribution (see Volume II); specialist “off-shoot” movements have been created where scholars and activists utilize CRT as a key part of understanding how particular dimensions of social identity (including ethnicity, sexuality and disability) are co-constituted in relation to race and racism in complex intersectional ways (see Volume III); and the movement itself has undergone shifts in focus and methods (see Volume IV). Despite all of these developments, however, CRT predominantly remains focused on questions of White racial domination and retains a strong activist/interventionist ethic: CRT is a theory with a purpose (to dismantle social injustice), it is not theory for its own sake (see the chapter by Laurence Parker and David Stovall, 2004, in this volume).

In this first volume, our focus is on the signature questions and concepts that are utilized by critical race theorists in education. Before considering some of the key ideas in more detail, however, it is necessary to comment on the overall shape of contemporary CRT scholarship. Once again, the quotation above remains apposite; “there is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which we all subscribe” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii). Certain authors and ideas have assumed totemic status but there is no single dominant statement of *the* CRT framework. In many ways this is a strength; it both reflects, and facilitates, the constant growth of CRT in dynamic ways that are able to respond to the

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ever-changing nature of contemporary racisms in education policy and practice. But, at the same time, this flexibility can feed confusion – some authors mistakenly assume that the use of a single idea (such as the socially constructed nature of race) or method (such as storytelling) is sufficient to define their work as CRT and justify whatever conclusions they wish to assert. This is neither accurate nor useful: as Gloria Ladson-Billings forcefully argues in the sixth chapter of this volume, CRT has been built on hard work and rigorous scholarship. CRT often takes surprising and unconventional forms, but its rigor and substance are essential to the continued survival and significance of the approach.

Numerous writers, and several chapters in this collection, offer a working definition or outline of key ideas that the authors viewed as helping to define what was distinctive about a CRT approach at the time of writing. They have used a variety of terms (including “elements,” “perspectives,” and “tenets”) and, although the precise wording and emphasis sometimes varies, there is strong commonality in the substantive characteristics.

One of the earliest descriptions, focusing on six “defining elements,” was co-authored by four of the foundational figures in legal CRT, Charles Lawrence III, Mari Matsuda, Richard Delgado and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1993, pp. 6–7);

- 1 Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.
- 2 Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy.
- 3 Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law.
- 4 Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color ...
- 5 Critical race theory is interdisciplinary and eclectic.
- 6 Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression.

Reviewing the literature on CRT in US education a decade later, Adrienne Dixson and Celia Rousseau (2005) observed that the first four of these “tenets” were most strongly in evidence and argued for more attention to be paid to the opportunities for interdisciplinarity and consciously organizing with a view to effecting real change. In the late 1990s Daniel Solórzano provided a formulation that identified “*at least* five themes that form [CRT’s] basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy” (1997, p. 6, emphasis added) which closely echo Lawrence et al.’s (1993) elements and have subsequently been repeated and refined in work with a variety of colleagues (including the final chapter in this volume which Solórzano co-authored with Tara Yosso, William Smith and Miguel Ceja, 2009). Within these broad defining elements, a series of concepts

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and methods have gradually emerged as core ideas that frequently (though not always) characterize CRT in education and provide powerful tools of analysis, including the interest convergence principle, intersectionality, the use of counter-storytelling, and, more recently, the notion of racial microaggressions (a concept that did not originate in CRT but has been expanded and popularized through the work of critical race scholars). Each of these ideas is explored in this volume.

The volume begins with a selection of papers that explore the legal and educational foundations of CRT scholarship. Derrick A. Bell Jr. is a prominent contributor to the volume, reflecting his standing as perhaps the single most important figure among the foundational critical race theorists. His chapters, on racial realism and the rules of racial standing, exemplify CRT's view of race as an historically-specific, complex and fluid social construct that saturates public life to such an extent that "racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi). Paul Warmington's chapter shows how people's treatment of race *as if* it is a real "thing" (rather than a social construct) has important material, sometimes violent, consequences. Moving beyond the US and UK, Möschel reflects on these insights from a broader European perspective that tends to view a colorblind approach as necessary and virtuous because of their post-World War II historical suspicion of racialized analyses.

Bell's scholarship again features at the heart of the second section of this volume, which considers the "interest convergence principle." Bell's analysis, that apparent advances in race equity are accommodated only when they converge with the interests of whites, is one of the most famous and widely-misunderstood concepts in CRT. Jamel Donnor uses a real life case study to explore the concept's usefulness and to correct some of the most important misuses of the idea. Lani Guinier draws attention to the other side of convergence (*divergence*) and lays the foundations for an approach that accords them equal weight in understanding the ebb and flow of race politics. This process lies at the heart of Dana Thompson Dorsey and Terah Venzant Chambers' model which captures the familiar policy cycles of short lived gain (convergence), then growing divergence and eventually reclamation that restores the racist status quo.

The concept of intersectionality was originally coined, by the leading critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, as a means of analyzing how gendered and racist oppressions collide and interact in ways that have especially damaging consequences for women of color. Subsequently the term has been taken up and used in numerous disciplines internationally. Feminist researchers have been especially prominent in taking forward intersectional scholarship (see the chapter by Brah and Phoenix for an influential example) while additional examples include analyses of the intersection of race and disability (a field where Alfredo J. Artiles is a world-leading authority).

Recent decades have seen an explosion in scholarship that focuses on the creation and impacts of education policy. CRT has generated important new insights that relate to both the minutiae of daily school life (as explored in the

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chapters by DeCuir and Dixon, and Parker and Stovall) and long-established patterns of race inequity such as the so-called “achievement gap.” As Ladson-Billings argues in the fourteenth chapter, the CRT principle of viewing racism in its historic context is especially important in understanding achievement inequity, not as a “gap” signifying deficit or individual failings, but as a “debt” rooted in centuries old processes of exclusion and oppression that are re-shaped and reinforced in the present.

The volume concludes with contributions that explore the importance of the CRT theme of recognizing the experiential knowledge of people of color and, in particular, exploring the power of voice through the use of autobiography and counter-storytelling methods. These approaches are not unique to CRT but they have become closely associated with the movement and have proven especially important in uncovering the routine mundane acts of racial oppression (microaggressions) that have such a devastating impact on the lives of many people.

Finally, it should be noted that the organization of the material (both within and between volumes) is intended to act as a helpful guide to key themes and issues in CRT in education. The divisions are not fixed (there are numerous other ways that we could have presented the material) and neither are they impermeable. It is a characteristic of CRT that the scholarship is frequently wide-ranging and eclectic. Each volume, therefore, includes papers that closely relate to other parts of the collection. For instance, Volume II includes an influential piece, by Gillborn, charting how the basic assumptions and outcomes of education policy tend to embody and serve White racial interests; Volume III includes numerous papers that explore intersectionality in detail and a chapter, by Alemán and Alemán, that provides a new interpretation of interest convergence. The final volume includes papers that relate to every other volume and, in particular, includes powerful scholarship on CRT methods and the use of counterstories.

The novel and powerful nature of CRT scholarship has proven especially attractive to a new generation of radical researchers and activists working across the globe. CRT in education is strongest in North America and the UK, but it also has a growing presence in Europe, Central and South America, South Africa and Australia. We hope that this collection will further advance understandings of the approach and lay the foundations for even better scholarship in the future.

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