

2021 Special Committee on Education

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Critical Race Theory in Kansas Public Schools

Testimony by Rep. Patrick Penn

Chair, Representative Kristey Williams; Vice Chair, Senator Molly Baumgardner; Ranking Minority Member, Valdenia Winn; and Committee Members thank you for holding this important hearing and extending the opportunity to speak before you today.

I know you have much to cover, so I will keep my remarks as brief as possible, and stand for questions at the appropriate time.

Critical Race Theory, or CRT, has been a topic of interest nationwide as of late. Not many know what this ideological weapon is and even fewer can identify when it is in operation or employment, especially in the educational setting. Here is a brief thoughtline to look at the Rotten Roots of Critical Race Theory:

CRT is borne of the Critical Social Justice worldview and you must understand and connect the dots of its origins to realize exactly what is being pushed by CRT proponents in our schools.

In the early 1820's, a profound German philosopher by the name of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel developed a dialectic to explain how positive change is achieved in society. The Hegelian Dialectic posited that through a system of incremental interactions between a Thesis and a contrary Anti-Thesis (antithesis), a new Synthesis can be achieved. That Synthesis would serve as the new Thesis. With the application of an additional antithesis, new synthesis would result, and this iterative process would continue until the desired outcome is achieved.

Hegel's protégé, Karl Marx, would take his Dialectic great steps further. Marx was the leading architect of the most dominant school of thought within sociology, known as Conflict Theory. Marx viewed society as a group of different social classes

all competing for a limited pool of resources such as food, housing, employment, education, and leisure time. Most notably was his operationalizing of the Hegelian Dialectic into an economic model of conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat that would eventually lead to his desired outcome of Socialism.

Antonio Gramsci was a student of Karl Marx, and this Italian Marxist endeavored to understand and answer why did the Socialist Revolution not catch fire globally as Karl envisioned. He formulated the concept of Hegemony. Simply put, Gramsci says hegemony is what takes place when a dominant group imposes its ideology on the rest of society, and “thus social control is achieved through conditioning rather than physical force or intimidation.” For Gramsci, the concept of hegemony explained how domination and control are maintained not only through coercion, but also through the voluntary consent of both the oppressed and their oppressors to maintain the status quo. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci called for efforts at “Cultural Marxism” against the Hegemonic structure to untether societal moorings and deliver the uprising/revolution necessary to bring about the Socialist future his mentor Karl Marx envisioned.

After the Marxist revolution failed to topple capitalism in the early 20th century, many Marxists went back to the drawing board, modifying and adapting Marx’s ideas further. Most famous of these thinkers was a group associated with the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, which applied Marxism to a radical interdisciplinary social theory. The group included Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and others, and became known as The Frankfurt School.

These men developed and published Critical Theory as an expansion of Marx’s Conflict Theory and applied it more broadly, including in other social sciences and philosophy as they and their protégés penetrated and replicated their ideology throughout American postsecondary institutions. The Frankfurt School’s main goal was to address structural issues causing inequity. They worked from the assumption that current social reality was broken, and they needed to identify the people and institutions that could make changes and provide practical goals for social transformation.

From here, we arrive at Harvard in 1989, when Dr. Derrick Bell galvanized the efforts at Critical Legal Studies (CLS) to create Critical Race Theory. Critical Legal Studies was a leftist movement that challenged traditional legal scholarship, and CRT is an outgrowth of it. CRT aims to further the cause of Gramsci's Cultural Marxism, in alignment with Marx's Conflict Theory and Socialism, and foments racial discord in our society. CRT is an infiltrating poison that must be arrested and eradicated.

According to the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs:

"CRT recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing power structures. CRT identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. CRT also rejects the traditions of liberalism and meritocracy. Legal discourse says that the law is neutral and colorblind, however, CRT challenges this legal "truth" by examining liberalism and meritocracy as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege." ¹

Many discussions of CRT have referenced this definition, as it is as clear and succinct a definition you will find. It captures both the essence and major tenets of CRT and comes from a source that has led the charge for CRT in recent years; hence it is a case of proponents of CRT defining themselves.

According to Richard Delgado, this "analytical lens one uses to examine the world" is based on four key presuppositions:

1. Racism is normal and is the usual way society does business, the common everyday experience of most people of color in this country. ²
2. Convergence Theory: "Racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class whites (mentally), large segments of society

have little incentive to eradicate it.”³ This means whites are incapable of righteous actions on race and only undo racism when it benefits them; when their interests “converge” with the interests of people of color.

3. Anti-Liberalism: CRT questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.⁴
4. Knowledge is Socially Constructed: Storytelling/Narrative Reading is the way black people forward knowledge vs. the Science/ reason method of white people. Minority status, in other words, brings with it an exclusive and presumed competence to speak about race and racism.⁵

As Tara Yosso, one of the most-cited academics on Critical Race Theory, expands on Delgado’s fourth tenet: The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge—CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination.⁶

From CRT we get Kimberle Crenshaw’s “Intersectionality,” which is about the multiple layers of oppression minorities suffer.

Cultural Marxist ideological weapons such as CRT and Intersectionality, are suspected of infiltrating our school systems via channels of Diversity, Equity, and Accountability trainings for teachers, as well as SEL initiatives. Promotion of such divisive concepts invariably lead to a lack of focus on instruction that matters, our current abysmal deterioration in Kansas student achievement, and an introduction of a whole host of negative behavioral and emotional challenges thrust upon our impressionable and vulnerable children.

Thank you.

Rep. P.A. Penn

1. "What is Critical Race Theory?," UCLA School of Public Affairs, Critical Race Studies, <https://spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory>.
2. Richard Delgado, Critical Race Theory (Third Edition) (New York, New York: New York University Press, Kindle Edition), 8.
3. Ibid., 9.
4. Ibid., 3.
5. Ibid., 11.
6. Tara J. Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," Race Ethnicity and Education 8, no. 1 (August 23, 2006), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1361332052000341006>.