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# **We Have Seen This Before: The Racial Status Quo and “Anti-CRT” Discourse**

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## **Abstract**

Conservative politicians and political pundits have waged an attack on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies in public universities, p-12 public education systems, and state governments. The conservatives who decry DEI have mislabeled them as “Critical Race Theory” (CRT) and have made efforts to ban CRT and everything it has labeled as CRT, including children and young adult books. This paper analyzes the attacks on CRT and DEI policies in p-20 education. We argue that the attacks are part of a broader and longer history of racial subordination efforts. Further, we argue that Conservatives use their objections to diversity as a distraction from efforts to eradicate all racial justice projects

When giving a keynote address at Portland State University in 1975, Toni Morrison stated,

It’s important, therefore, to know who the real enemy is, and to know the function, the very serious function of racism, which is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and so you spend 20 years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn’t shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says that you have no art so you dredge that up. Somebody says that you have no kingdoms and so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. (1975, 35:48)

Toni Morrison’s commentary serves as a reminder for those of us who seek to dismantle white supremacist racism within society that racism is deployed in ways that often distract us, people of color, from focusing on creating, participating, or as Morrison states very simply, “doing our work.” The “unnecessary-ness” of racism is what we argue is the distraction of racism. Moreover, the distraction of racism is supported by the ideology of white supremacy and its ubiquity in social policy, U.S. *juris*

*prudence*, police violence, and the dehumanization of racially marginalized peoples (Bell, 1994; Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Desmond, 2015; Mills, 1994). Further, while the contours of racism appear to shift as Morrison reminds us, the sites of social backlash and injustice remain stable: schools and curricula; knowledge production; living conditions and the environment; and, access to the franchise. Thus, from our view, the very nature of white supremacy as a social ideology in the U.S. is constantly mobilized to obstruct and divert efforts for racial justice (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1988; Dixon, 2015).

The distraction of racism, i.e. preventing us from doing our “work,” has materialized in public discourse through anti-critical race theory (CRT) discourse, book bans, and ethnic studies curriculum bans in nearly 30 U.S. states. Anti-CRT discourse is an attempt to destroy racial justice efforts in the P-20 education system. This discourse engages in purposeful misrepresentation and distortion of CRT and all efforts for equity, diversity, and inclusion. Conservative activist and journalist, Chris Rufo described his strategy to villainize CRT and everything he and his supporters believe are “cultural insanities” on twitter.

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. (Rufo, 2021)

The distortions of CRT cast any and everything having to do with racial and cultural differences, teaching the history of racial and ethnic groups, and the dominating effects of white supremacist racism, as anti-White Anglo-Saxon and anti-Christian. For scholars who situate their research within CRT, they view it as a tool that can offer a perspective for racial redress; that is, as a theoretical framework and analytical framework, CRT helps scholars “see” racial subordination as a function of white supremacy (Bell, 1993; 1995; Carbado, 2011; Crenshaw, 1987, 2011; Crenshaw et al 1995; Dixon & Anderson, 2018; Hamilton, 2021; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda et al., 1993). Scholars whose scholarship is foundational to CRT, applied CRT to offer transformational analyses of historical and contemporary conditions to illuminate racial oppression in the U.S. (see Crenshaw et al, 1995). The anti-CRT discourse exposes the neo-conservatives who evade discussing race or racism and their refusal to acknowledge and repair the conditions caused by white supremacist acts.

This anti-CRT discourse is not new, as CRT scholars note opposition from others within the academy who sought to discredit CRT's validity (Bell, 1995; Calmore, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Albeit under a different context, recent anti-CRT discourse cast race talk as wicked, presumably because of the concern about whether people will feel guilt or discomfort (Wexler, 2022). Eradicating White discomfort, from our perspective, is a key feature of White supremacist ideology. Thus, for anti-CRT advocates, p-20 schools, students, and those who lead educator trainings, must avoid race talk; this avoidance maintains the status quo of white supremacist racial power. As CRT is inextricably linked to ending racial oppression as a means of ending all forms of oppression (Dixon & Rosseau Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 1993; Crenshaw et al, 1995), we discuss anti-CRT commentary as a facet of white supremacist racist discourse due to its opposition to racial justice.

Historically, challenging the status quo of racial oppression within the United States has often provoked hostile responses from White supremacists seeking to stop racial justice and those who are wedded to the slow moderate race based incremental change (Bell, 1993, 1995; Klarman, 1994; 2005). This is apparent after the Supreme Court's 1954 to *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to end school segregation. Across the South, white segregationist politicians sought to uphold white supremacy through a plethora of legislative sessions, election campaigns alongside support of white communities that sought to uphold the dual education system through physical and mental violence (Klarman, 1994; 2005; Ladino, 1996). Southern White racial moderates who also opposed school desegregation desired to enact the *Brown decision*, through slow incremental desegregation plans that would take over years to enact. However, White southern segregationists coerced southern White racial moderates to recant their position, through

an us (White) versus them (Black) narratives (Klarman, 1994; 2005), that often hinders racial justice movements for Black people in the U.S (Bell, 1993; 1995, 2008).

In this essay, we explore these questions and argue that the recent anti-CRT discourse is an extension of the longstanding, historic white supremacist discourse intended to thwart racial justice. To substantiate our claim, we draw on anti-NAACP discourse from the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and connect it to the current development and spread of anti-CRT discourse, looking specifically at how the discourse of white supremacy sought to stall school desegregation. As our focus is anti-CRT discourse we will not focus on the content of various P-20 curriculums, but the language utilized by majority white conservative politicians, activist and parents that seek to remove conversations about race from the educational sphere.

To frame this essay, we draw on the intellectual foundation of CRT. In the mid-1990s, one of CRT's founders, Derrick Bell (1995), asked, "Who's afraid of critical race theory?" (p. 893). From our perspective as CRT scholars in education, those who are afraid of CRT are those who (un)knowingly hold, perform, and maintain white supremacy through their thoughts and actions (Bell, 1993; 1995, 2008). But how did we get to this place of anti-CRT discourse? How has white supremacist racist discourse been used before to mitigate or stall racial justice, particularly within education?

### **White supremacy, Black educators, and anti-NAACP discourse**

**S**outhern Black educators were vital in the Black freedom struggle during Jim Crow segregation, as they were among the first to recognize how race-based inequalities manifested in public education for African Americans (Siddle Walker, 2013). Black educators in the South during this time were critical, and their teaching was rooted in cultural norms that uplifted the race of Black students and prepared them to live in a white supremacist world that would soon be desegregated (Givens, 2021; Siddle Walker, 2001; Tillman, 2004). Despite the essentially good and valuable qualities of segregated Black schools, Southern Black educators identified shortened school terms, lack of federal funding, lack of transportation, dilapidated school buildings and race-based pay inequality as primary obstacles to racially equal public education (Siddle Walker, 2013). Noting these racial injustices, Black Southern educators, parents and children enlisted the legal support of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

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The NAACP's 1954 victory in *Brown v. Board of Education* was the catalyst for the ensuing white backlash in the South, retaliation that stretched into the 1960s during the height of the Civil Rights Movement and drew on baseless communism claims (Braden, 1963; Woods, 2004). Known as the Red Scare, conservative politicians during the Cold War era drew upon communism as a rallying cry to mobilize their base against altering societal conditions (e.g., racial segregation). The ruling in *Brown* meant that federal law would now supersede states' rights. Common discourse from Southern White supremacist segregationist politicians was that the NAACP and those who were fighting for racial justice for Black Americans were communists (Berg, 2007; Braden, 1963; Woods, 2004). A main goal of these segregationist politicians was to sever ties between Black educators and the NAACP. Following the *Brown* decision, anti-Communist, NAACP-targeted legislation was passed in Florida, Texas, Arkansas, Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama as a means to dismantle the NAACP and hinder integration through the legislature (Fultz, 2004; Woods, 2004). Due to its fight against education

inequality in Black communities, the NAACP was the focus of such legislation as it "had grown to become the largest and most important organization for the promotion of racial change in the South" (Woods, 2004, p. 49). Through anti-Communist legislation, segregationists singled out the NAACP as the main organization to attack (Woods, 2004). White supremacist southerners viewed the NAACP as a problem because they were the main organizers of integration litigation during the 1940s-1950s which led to the desegregation of schools. Despite the calls of the NAACP as communist, no substantial evidence was ever found to support such claims.

Anti-NAACP legislation was a direct attack on both the organization and Black educators who comprised the only large group of state employees that were members of the NAACP (Cunningham, 2021). In 1955, the Georgia Board of Education noted that it would permanently nullify any teacher affiliated with the NAACP or similar organizations (Fultz, 2004). This act was supported by the Georgia Education Association's all-white teacher collective, which directly opposed integration. In 1956 in South Carolina, anti-NAACP legislation enforced the firing of any state employee that was a member of the NAACP (Cunningham, 2021; Felder; 2012; Fultz, 2004). Furthermore, the legislation required state employees to submit a questionnaire or statement that would note if they were a member of the NAACP and how they felt about school integration. While this legislation was not legally defensible, future state legislation required educators to name their organizational affiliations and allowed state employers the right to dismiss educators' applications based on their affiliations. Due to anti-NAACP legislation, numerous Black educators lost their jobs, and many were unable to work as educators in the state again (Cunningham, 2021; Felder, 2012; Stokes Brown & Clark, 1990).

Alongside federal and state government officials who opposed desegregation, a White supremacist community-based organization named White Citizens Council mobilized across the South in the 1950s (Cunningham, 2021; Ladino, 1996). Goals of the council were to disrupt the decision in *Brown* through resistance, recruiting a wide array of white communities to join the fight for racial segregation, pro-segregation media campaigns in public newspapers, and coercion via social isolation that impacted people who did not join their cause (Ladino, 1996). Although the foundation of the Council was in Winona, Mississippi, a South Carolina chapter began in Orangeburg County, due to their beliefs of the state being the "home of the militant Negro intelligentsia" (Jet Magazine, 1955 as cited by Cunningham, 2021, p. 41). By 1957, the White Citizens Council of South Carolina grew to almost 60 chapters that spread throughout the state. The success of the White Citizens Council in South Carolina encouraged white segregationist politicians from other southern states to visit and learn their strategies to defeat integration (Cunningham, 2021). Because of Southern White supremacist segregationist politicians and the White Citizens Council, the NAACP membership in South Carolina dropped by over 5000.

One strategy White supremacist segregationist politicians and community members relied on was their discourse. White supremacist discourse demonized those who participated in the Black freedom struggle. Often characterized as communism, this rhetorical practiced was used as a fear tactic by White segregationist who worked hard to squash school integration in the South (Braden, 1964; Kruse, 2004; Woods, 2004). The goal of white supremacist southern politicians, ironically, was to connect racial equality with communism, subversion with immorality, and protest for freedom as un-American. These discourses started much earlier than the *Brown* decision. In the late 1930s, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), a congressional investigation group (Carr, 1951), stated in its second report, "communism is a worldwide political organization advocating ... (among other things) absolute social and racial equality" (Braden, 1963, p. 19). This committee, and its work to limit Communism, was praised, in the white supremacist organization's propaganda newspaper by the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan (Braden, 1963). For decades notable white supremacist segregationist politicians primarily from the South (e.g., Representative Martin Dies of Texas, Representative John Rankin Of Mississippi, Representative Edwin Willis of Louisiana, and Representative William Tuck of Virginia (Braden, 1963). In 1947, John Rankin, an avid supporter of the Klu Klux Klan, stated that the "racial disturbances you

have seen in the South have been inspired by the tentacles of this great octopus, communism, which is out to destroy everything” (Woods, 2004 p. 28). Rankin's message was supported by his southern peers, who saw themselves as protecting democracy and white values. Leander Perez, judge, the district attorney in Plaquemines Parrish, Louisiana, and White Citizens Council leader noted the *Brown* decision as “Communist Trash” and called the NAACP a “Communist front infested organization” (Woods, 2004 p. 56). The White Citizens Council spread their discourse throughout the South via pamphlets (Ladino, 1996), some of which reinforced segregation as Christian and racial integration as an immoral communist invention meant to destroy society (Gillespie, 1954; Rogers, 1956). Following this logic, in 1955, Eugene Cook, the Attorney General of Georgia, gave a speech titled “The Ugly Truth About the NAACP,” which was printed and spread by the White Citizens Council (Braden, 1964). Before noting a list of Communist wrongdoings, Cook stated,

I refer to the subversive designs behind the current crusade of the misnamed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and its fellow traveling fronts to force upon the South the Communist-inspired doctrine of racial integration and amalgamation.... At the outset I wish to make it clear that the issue involved is one not of race but rather of subversion.

(Cook, 1955, pp. 1-2).

Cook relies on anti-NAACP discourse rooted in white supremacy to claim the NAACP is a threat to the South due to their insistence on racial justice. Within this attempt to discredit the work of the NAACP, Cook draws on race evasiveness to claim his issue is not about race but communism. He argues that racial integration is communist-led and overthrows the current system of segregation. Cook's anti-NAACP discourse affirmed southern white beliefs about the evilness of the NAACP and the need to dismantle the organization (Kruse, 2004).

This rhetoric can be seen in a notable historical image of the Little Rock 9 integration protesters, in which white protestors brandished signs saying "Race Mixing is Communism" and "Stop the Race Mixing March of the Anti-Christ" (Little Rock 9 integration protest, 1957).



When speaking about integration, the Attorney General of Alabama in 1961, MacDonald Gallion, was quoted as saying, “I want to warn you that it's the communists who are behind this integration mess” (Braden, 1964, p. 3).

Taken together, it appears that the function of these blatant displays of White supremacist southern discourse was to distract from racial justice and the Black freedom struggle. Because communism was associated with racial equality, the movement for Black rights, the NAACP, and civil rights activists were labeled as deviants, un-American, and threatening to the safety and quality of life for white people. However, the white supremacist segregationists used their racist discourse to curtail advancements toward racial equality and the human rights for Black Americans. Racial justice activists spent more time refuting claims that they were communists and less time doing the work necessary to further racial justice in the courts. Hence, racism was a distraction.

### **Anti-CRT Discourse and Education**

Like anti-NAACP and anti-integration commentary during the Civil Rights era, anti-CRT discourse developed when calls for racial justice from Black Americans sought highlighted white supremacist conditions within the country. In the summer of 2020, our nation saw several protests that sparked a “racial reckoning” after the lynching of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. During this time, many K-12 school districts and higher education institutions across the country publicly denounced white supremacy, trying to align themselves with racial justice considering these events. However, with this stance, many of these institutions, particularly in K-12 education, experienced a white back lash and recalcitrance for their stated support of racial justice.

Like anti-NAACP and anti-integration discourse, the starting place for current anti-CRT discourse is rooted within right-wing politicians. In September 2020, after a summer of many protests around the country that called for racial justice, the former President Donald Trump released a memorandum that effectively banned all federally funded agencies that utilize,

...training on ‘critical race theory,’ ‘white privilege,’ or any other training or propaganda effort that teaches or suggests either (1) that the United States is an inherently racist or evil country or (2) that any race or ethnicity is inherently racist or evil. (Vought, 2020, p. 1)

As stated earlier, the genesis of this attack on CRT comes from Chris Rufo, a conservative journalist and activist. The former President, Donald Trump invited Rufo to the White House to assist with the executive order one day after he appeared on Fox News calling for Trump to ban CRT (Gabriel, 2022). Detractors of CRT reject a basic premise of CRT: the permanence of racism in the U.S (Bell, 1993; Dixson & Anderson, 2018; Matsuda et al., 1993). Moreover, contemporary CRT detractors claim that CRT scholars assert certain races are “inherently racist or evil.” This distortion of CRT provided the support for the Trump memorandum that claimed CRT stands in opposition to the country and its founding principles. Furthermore, the memorandum was a call to denounce any support of trainings that focused on racial inequities by claiming white privilege is disinformation.

Adding to anti-CRT discourse is the important caveat regarding the nation's foundation. Rejecting the history of U.S racism, is from our purview, an example of white supremacist, ahistoricism. This assertion allows for those who align with white supremacy to absolve themselves from addressing the genocide of Indigenous peoples, the dispossession of land under the aegis of Manifest Destiny, violent annexation campaigns, and the enslavement of Africans and their descendants, catastrophic American phenomena from which white Americans have reaped the benefits, both materially, politically, and socially. Failing to name the country as racist erases the litany of such inhumane sins committed by white supremacists of the past and present. However, this anti-CRT discourse within the Trump memorandum did not solely denounce CRT, but brought attention to, and provided language for, a playbook on how to condemn racial justice within conservative public discourse.

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Why does Trump’s discourse matter? Associating CRT with evil and anti-American sentiments serves as a rallying cry that encourages conservative supporters to unite around the cause of dismantling approaches to racial justice in publicly funded spaces — to evoke the tyranny of the hegemonic (i.e., powerful) white majority. Although this memorandum was canceled by President Biden a few months later in 2021, the impact remains since current and former conservative federal and state politicians continue to contribute to anti-CRT discourse. In May 2021, Steve Bannon, former Trump advisor, stated:

The CRT, they want to break the foundation of the Judeo-Christian West, they are in the schools and military...If they are going to prove CRT, boom you are gone. We are going to show up, vote

you out, boom, next and we are going to put moms in there... 'The path to save the nation is very simple — it's going to go through the school boards.' (Bannon, May 19, 2021).

As an extension of the public domain, public schools, and school boards have recently received attention regarding anti-CRT discourse. Bannon's statement suggests that CRT is sacrilegious and that it will harm the Christian nation. Bannon argues that the U.S is in great trouble and needs saving from CRT. He contends that CRT threatens not just the nation, but specifically the public education system, because CRT is harming children within schools. Bannon's declaration raises questions about the future and viability of U.S. society writ large and public education specifically. Bannon identifies mothers as shields to protect children, and thus the nation from the anti-American ideologies that make up CRT. Calling on white mothers to essentially uphold white supremacy to protect their children has historical precedence. Conservative white segregationist mothers sought to maintain white supremacy within public education systems from the 1920s to the 1970s through grassroots organizing to protect their children from racial integration (McRae, 2018). Moreover, the anti-CRT rhetoric lays out a strategy to save the nation and the nation's children by infiltrating school boards, animating the angst and fears of White parents, and removing anyone who supports CRT.

Other politicians have made similar proclamations that accuse CRT and its proponents of pushing an-American sentiment in education. Shortly after Bannon's statement, in June of 2021, Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida utilized anti-CRT discourse when he uttered,

"We are going to get the Florida political apparatus involved so we can make sure there's not a single school board member who supports Critical Race Theory." (Gancarski, 2021).

Shortly after the previous statement, Governor DeSantis posted more anti-CRT discourse via Twitter, Florida's education system exists to create opportunity for our children. Critical Race Theory teaches kids to hate our country and to hate each other. It is state-sanctioned racism and has no place in Florida schools. (DeSantis, 2021).

These comments are an extension of Trump's memorandum and Bannon's statements. DeSantis aligned his race evasive and anti-CRT discourse by highlighting the nation, its children, and school boards. Why? Because he strives to paint CRT as harmful. The tacit message here is that anti-CRT supporters will overtake school board members and remove CRT from schools. Importantly, these messages frame CRT as the villain which will cause racial tension amongst children of different racial and ethnic. Echoing the sentiments and going one step further than his colleagues' anti-CRT discourse was U.S Senator Ted Cruz from Texas noted in June 2021

Critical race theory says every white person is a racist. Critical race theory says America is fundamentally racist and irredeemably racist. Critical race theory seeks to turn us against each other and, if someone has different colored skin, seeks to make us hate that person...Critical race theory is bigoted, it is a lie, and it is every bit as racist as the klansmen in white sheets...it is evil (Cruz, 2021).

Anti-CRT discourse flames were stoked again as Cruz named CRT by inciting racial hostility. Despite CRT's call for reparations (Matsuda, 1987), Cruz negatively painted CRT as lacking pragmatic solutions to the white supremacist sins of the nation. Perhaps the Senator's most egregious distortion of CRT was his association of it with a vile white supremacist organization, the KKK. Cruz failed to mention that neither CRT nor critical race theorists have strung up people of Color from trees, incited race riots, burned down communities, bombed churches, or committed several other heinous acts.

Like anti-NAACP discourse of communism, these politicians draw on anti-CRT discourse to demonize CRT and those who support it in public venues. As shown in the above excerpts, the foundation of anti-CRT discourse rejects CRT's claim of racism's permanence in the U.S and falsely associates CRT with deeming certain races as inherently racist, evil, hostile, harmful to children and the nation. While the anti-CRT discourse was elevated by the politicians mentioned above, conservative anti-CRT parents have followed suit. Next, we note how this anti-CRT discourse has shown up in two different communities.

## Parents Against Race in Schools

Like the White Citizens Councils support of anti-NAACP integration commentary, conservative parental rights collectives are mobilizing anti-CRT discourse to remove the topic of race from publicly funded education systems (Adams, 2021; Kingkade et al., 2021; Meckler and Dawsey, 2021). Moms for Liberty, a majority white women conserve led social movement organization, Williamson County, Tennessee Chapter is but one example (Mangrum, 2021). In a June 2021 complaint, this group noted that Williamson County Schools violated recently passed anti-CRT legislation through teaching materials and books on Ruby Bridges, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Silvia Mendez that ...reveal both explicit and implicit Anti-American, Anti-White and Anti-Mexican Teaching. Additionally, it implies to second grade children that people of color continue to be oppressed by an oppressive 'angry, vicious, scary, mean, loud, violent, [rude], and [hateful] white population and teaches that racial injustices of the 1960s exist today.... The narrow and slanted obsession on historical mistakes reveals a heavily biased agenda, one that makes children hate their country, each other, and/or themselves (Moms for Liberty Williamson County, 2021, p. 2).

Although a judge dismissed the case in 2021 for lack of evidence (Mangrum, 2021), a clear line of anti-CRT discourse extends from Rufo, the Heritage Foundation, and conservative politicians, into this memo. The discourse here shifts ever so slightly away from CRT and instead focuses on protecting whiteness and the adolescence of white children. Although the materials primarily focused on racial justice during the Civil Rights era, the lawsuit did not mention anti-Blackness while noting an anti-American, anti-White, and anti-Mexican curriculum. The memo failed to mention how white Americans imposed white supremacy on Black Americans. We can only speculate why anti-Blackness was not noted within the memo. This discourse seeks to

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cast a positive light on the White supremacist acts caused previously by white U.S citizens. Thus, these parents sought to impose guidelines that erased objective historical facts and important historical figures like Ruby Bridges, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Silvia Mendez. This attempt by Mom's for Liberty also extends the Rufo's talking points that claim that multicultural curriculum are a manifestation of CRT ideology that serve to make White children hate themselves and incite racial hostility between racial groups.

Other conservative parents have also drawn on anti-CRT discourse in school board protests. In Loudon, Virginia, after several anti-Black incidents, the school board sought to implement racial justice initiatives. However, the conservative majority white community did not agree. Large crowds brandished signs in hopes of recalling six school board members who publicly supported diversity and equity. The signs in the crowd read: "Stop teaching Critical Race Theory to Our Kids," "Education not indoctrination," "Creating racial tension" and "You don't end racism by teaching it" (Oliphant & Borter, 2021). Similarly, in Southlake, Texas, the Carol ISD school board sought to implement a diversity and inclusion plan for staff and students. This plan began as a response to a viral video with white teenage girls saying the N-word, Black parents noting white students calling their Black children the N-word, white students telling race jokes about Black people, and white students committing physical acts of race-based violence against Black students (Hylton & Hixenbaugh, 2021a). After recurring protests within school board hearings, two members who sought to implement the diversity and inclusion plan were replaced by anti-CRT candidates. Celebrating the victory, a community member noted, "Seventy percent of our community

disagree with critical race theory. Seventy percent deny there is systemic racism at CISD. Seventy percent want a new school board president” (Hylton & Hixenbaugh, 2021b).

Such anti-CRT resistance from conservative predominately white and conservative politicians, aligns with Lani Guinier's (1995) explanation of *The tyranny of the majority*. The tyranny of the majority underscores how the white racial majority will pursue their interest to the detriment of racially marginalized people. That is, majority interest will lead to the decimation of the rights of the marginalized (Guinier, 1995). We note the tyranny of the majority as not simply a tallying of racialized people, but of who maintains racial power within the United States and its systems. Thus, even with the numerical decline of the white racial population, white people remain atop the racial wealth gap and are still over-represented in different powerful systems in the nation (e.g., elected officials, education, criminal justice, etc.). In this case, the majority interest of white people, a racially dominant group, seeks to evade talking about race, racism, and white supremacy to evading scrutiny from racially marginalized groups. Despite no evidence of CRT being taught directly to public school students across the country, conservative politicians, parents, and collectives work to remove the topic of race and multicultural histories from publicly funded education systems (Adams, 2021; Kingkade et al., 2021; Meckler and Dawsey, 2021). Since January 2021, anti-CRT discourse has produced 290 legislative bills across different states, many of which failed during various legislative sessions (Gottlieb 2023). However, 19 laws in 15 different states and seven executive orders overlap (e.g., South Dakota, Florida) that strive to eliminate the teaching of CRT, anti-racism, race, and color as of July 2022. These bills, laws, and executive orders protect the interest of the tyrannical majority, as

“vague and sweeping language means that they will be applied broadly and arbitrarily, threatening to effectively ban a wide swath of literature, curriculum, historical materials, and other media, and casting a chilling effect over how educators and educational institutions discharge their primary obligations” (Friedman et al, 2021).

The interest of racially marginalized peoples is lost in these victories of anti-CRT supporters. For example, the tyranny of anti-CRT advocates impacted Tulsa Public Schools, the largest school district in Oklahoma (Pendharkar, 2022). Amy Cook, a white teacher filed a complaint about her forced participation in a training that she felt disparaged white people (Bikales, 2022; Osborne, 2022). This complaint posits Tulsa Public Schools was out of compliance with Oklahoma law HB1775, a law that impacts students, teachers, administrators, and staff in K-12 and higher education. Tulsa Public Schools was found in violation of training that causes "any individual [to] feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex" (HB1775 p. 3). This bill was not a law when the white teacher underwent professional development (Pendharkar, 2022). Regardless, the state board of education elected to downgrade Tulsa Public Schools' accreditation.

Republican lawmakers have proposed similar versions of Oklahoma's law in over 40 different states (Pendharkar, 2022), but some left-leaning politicians are voicing criticism. Representative Regina T. Goodwin, a Black state legislator in Oklahoma, noted that HB 1775 is “a trash law... that is going to tell us perhaps how we should teach concepts on race, how we should engage all children in the classroom, and how our teachers should be trained professionally” (Osborne, 2022). This brief statement by Representative Goodwin provides speaks to the tyranny of white majority interest reflected in anti-CRT discourse. In a school district composed of predominantly Latinx and Black students, this bill aims to vanish race discussion, an act that undermines racially marginalized peoples.

## Conclusion

**A** common belief is that we can eradicate racism by getting rid of racists. The assumption is that racism is merely a reflection of individual actors who are autonomous from the broader social milieu, structures, systems, and institutions, or passed down from family and community members to younger generations. Our attempt here was to highlight that white supremacist discourse has

served to stall racial justice decade after decade. On one hand, anti-NAACP discourse was a rallying cry to maintain the racial status quo of segregation because integration threatened white supremacy. On the other hand, anti-CRT discourse reinforces the racial status quo through the erasure of race discussion in education spaces because talking and/or learning about race exposes whiteness and white supremacy. Both this threat and exposure pivot on white discomfort and bring us back to the start of this essay. Because the function of racism is distraction, we, as those who seek to dismantle white supremacy, must remain steadfast in, and maintain our convictions about the mission and purpose of our work and its importance for not only the U.S., but the health and well-being of our communities. Spending time refuting baseless claims about socialism, or communism, or CRT, which has been conflated with teaching critical views of history, has worked to detract from furthering racial justice. We must continue to press toward the mark of liberty and freedom for ALL.

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