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EDUC-102: Issues in Education

7 December 2021

**The New Book Burning: Banning Critical Race Theory**

Every few years, it seems like both American political parties come up with new buzzwords. In 2016 it was “emails”, in 2018 it was “caravan”, and in 2020 it was “freedom”. Now, Republicans across the country have come up with a new term to frighten their constituents: “Critical Race Theory” (CRT).

According to Education Week, a nonpartisan news organization covering K-12 education, critical race theory is an academic idea “that race is a social construct, and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also something embedded in legal systems and policies.” (Sawchuk). At its core, critical race theory looks to educate students about the systemic injustices present in America and its history. Critical race theory studies actions like school segregation, redlining, and gerrymandering that have had long lasting effects on systemic oppression despite it being decades since the Civil Rights Act passed.

However, some conservatives have conflated critical race theory with ALL social justice movements–similarly to how they conflated all the police brutality protests with Black Lives Matter–and have used it as a buzzword to signal that something is “woke” and therefore bad. From diversity training to “cancel culture”, some conservatives worldwide believe that the heart of critical race theory is not learning about our dark history, but simply blaming all white people for the past actions of the nation. Just look at this tweet from former British National Party leader Nick Griffin (also, crop your memes, dude):

<https://twitter.com/NickGriffinBU/status/1467989827115233288>

In the tweet, Griffin post a picture of a brown bear, black bear, and polar bear, with text underneath stating, “BROWN BEAR”, “BLACK BEAR”, and “RACIST BEAR”, captioned “Critical race theory. The actual #racism afflicting the death pangs of liberalism.” This is a common criticism of critical race theory, saying it is racist against white people and simply asks white people to take responsibility for racism.

This is unfounded. White people are not being asked to apologize for systemic oppression, simply to acknowledge its existence. It’s not about saying all white people are racist and need to change, it’s about showing all people that systemic racism is a very real problem that needs to be addressed. It’s about explaining *why* the poverty rate in 2018 among Black people is 20.8% versus 8.1% for white people (Bureau, U. S. C.). It’s about explaining *why* 1 in 3 black men in America are likely to be imprisoned at some pointin their life, compared to 1 in 17 white men (“Mass Incarceration”). It’s about explaining *why* the average graduation rate for white people in the US is 89% yet just 80% for Black people (*Coe*).

Additionally, conservatives have pushed critical race theory as an anti-American, anti-democratic, and often “Communist” theory. They believe that students learning about the United States’ often negative history will turn them, I guess, into revolutionaries who want to overthrow the government. Their prime example of critical race theory’s anti-patriotic ways are the allegations of racism against America’s founding fathers.

Most proponents of critical race theory wouldn’t argue the genius of someone like Thomas Jefferson. His view of the nation created the foundation of one of the world’s greatest superpowers. However, how can one read the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence and not see the irony? The country’s founding document explains that “all men are created equal”, yet many of those who signed their name owned other human beings at this time. The nation is founded on hypocrisy. Many of the founding fathers were not great men. Some, it could be argued, were bad. Acknowledging this isn’t anti-America, it isn’t attacking the ideals this country was founded on, it is simply being okay with the country not being perfect and working to fix it.

What is American about forcing ideals on people? The country was founded on a violent revolution to free itself from a “tyrannical” regime. How is wanting to better the nation unamerican? How is pushing ideals that may differ from the norm unamerican? This is supposed to be the land of the free. Freedom of speech includes freedom of thought, and that freedom should be protected. It is not tyrannical to teach our history. However, it is tyrannical to change our history.

For years, American education has been white washed. Generations of people have learned an education based on a white person’s perspective, barely touching on slavery outside of an economic factor and instead only focusing on the rare times in history where the country has created a positive for Black people. The Emancipation Proclamation, 13th-15th amendments, Brown vs. Board of Ed., and the Civil Rights Movement are taught as the entirety of Black American history. Black history *is* American history. They shouldn’t be separated. That’s all critical race theory looks to do. It simply looks to finally teach American history as it should be taught–focusing on ALL Americans, not just those in power.

Despite all of its positives, critical race theory is being fought by the right as if it’s a bigger threat to Americans than the disease that has killed 800,000. Bills are being passed throughout the nation that would rip funding from schools that teach critical race theory. One bill proposed in Wisconsin would prohibit teaching concepts like “equity”, “institutional oppression”, and “social justice”. In Texas, a new bill just went into law that bans teachers from discussing “a widely debated and currently controversial issue of public policy or social affairs." (Garcia). The bill doesn’t specify what is a controversial issue, but a related bill passed made the rounds after a Texas school district executive said “…make sure that if you have a book on the Holocaust, that you have one that has an opposing, that has other perspectives.”. If something as evil, ruthless, and fact-laden as the Holocaust can be deemed “controversial”, then there’s no telling how far this governmental overreach of our education system will go.

Republicans’ ability to push everything they don’t like as anti-American, Marxist, and revolutionary is an attempt to maintain power akin to Thomas Jefferson’s original view of public education. Except instead of ensuring only wealthy white men get an education like Jefferson tried, Republicans are trying to make sure that *everyone* gets an education *written* by wealthy white men. This allows them to continue to push an idea of American exceptionalism, and call anyone who dares criticize their perfect country unamerican.

Critical race theory should not be a controversial curriculum. It’s simply creating an education that looks at American history unapologetically and unbiased. America has a dark history, but, as Churchill said, “those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”. The only true way to better our country is to acknowledge that we have problems. We aren’t a perfect country and trying to ban teachings like critical race theory only threatens to move us backwards.

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