

## Thoughts of a “Cultist”

By Erick Axxe

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In recent Arkansas Democrat-Gazette opinion pieces, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been labeled [toxic, racist](#), and a “[cult](#).” As our country debates how we present and discuss our legal and cultural history, I thought I would offer my fellow Arkansans thoughts from a “cultist”.

To begin, I would like to dispel some mistruths and rebut false claims published in the forecited opinion pieces. Ms. Kelley points out that CRT is not a true theory, but rather “an evolving and malleable practice.” He does so to argue that the thought derived from it should be eschewed from schools because it succumbs to an “unscientific cult.” CRT remains valid despite being a “malleable practice” because it was largely born out of the legal field. [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#), [Michelle Alexander](#), and [Ian Haney López](#), all central to the development of CRT, are trained lawyers. While I concede the terminology could be better, I would hope that [a now recognized legal practice](#) would be considered valuable material for a classroom setting.

Next, Ms. Kelley reports that “only a cult would toss biological fact (that race is socially constructed) out of its belief system.” Over the past two decades, scientific evidence has repeatedly found that racial categories lack a strong biological foundation. Research shows [considerable genetic overlap](#) across racial categories and [heterogeneity within racial categories](#). Inconsistencies in survey data across generations reveal the [ambiguity of racial categories within families](#). When tested against empirical data, the impurities of racial categories are revealed because the concept was created by humans as a way to organize and distribute power and resources.

If I must convince the readers that race has historically been used as a tool to classify and rank human bodies, I am afraid this entire piece will fall on deaf ears. Instead, I will address the more interesting argument against meritocracy or ‘colorblindness’. Let’s pretend we are playing a game of Monopoly, but we implement the rule that your piece, the thimble, is barred from buying property. After a few hundred turns around the board, you justifiably argue that this rule denies you Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. At that point, I concede the rule is unfair and vow to no longer discriminate against any Monopoly pieces. In fact, I vow to never again make rules for specific Monopoly pieces or recognize the unequal conditions developed from previous rules. How likely are you to play to the end of that game? Are you content with me turning a blind eye to all previous inequalities? You may argue that America’s meritocracy overcomes injustices of the past, but research shows a [persistent racial wealth gap](#) and [housing remains an important artery of wealth maintenance](#).

In contrast to Ms. Kelley’s and Dr. Gitz’s concern over racial interactions, CRT encourages individuals to focus on racist social structures: [housing inequalities](#), [food deserts](#), [unequal labor market opportunities](#), and the [disparate effects of incarceration](#). Dr. Gitz’s interpretation of whiteness as “the cause of all that ails us and the primary source of white supremacy” is simply astray. CRT encourages citizens to think seriously about why these immense differences in experience continue to plague our country. Although Derek Chauvin’s knee sharply awakened

America's consciousness of the toxicity of interpersonal racism, critical race theorists argue that simply loving our neighbors regardless of skin color cannot solve these problems.

The question remains; what will? A good start would be a healthy debate. This means truly listening to what the other side has to say. A friend recently posted negative content on social media about CRT and I asked why they opposed it. I was fortunate enough to receive a well-thought-out response. I then understood that people fear the decay of our national identity – an identity that revolves around the Declaration of Independence, the Boston Tea Party, and our emancipation from British Imperialists. But Americans' common identity transcends the actions of a small group of brave landowners over two hundred years ago. We can point to innumerable people that fought for freedom, both domestic and abroad. We can point to our undeniable resilience and ability to overcome formidable challenges, such as vaccinating much of our country just a year after the start of a pandemic.

Yet to ban our youth from learning about the racial terrors our country has wrought upon its own people would be at best negligence and at worst malevolent. Though slaves were largely barred from literacy, the few narratives that do exist ought to be essential readings. To hear Frederick Douglass [share how slaveowners whipped him bloody](#) and how Harriet Jacobs [hid in an attic for seven years to avoid further sexual assault from her owner](#) is not meant to further divide our country, but rather to listen to our ancestors and learn from our country's mistakes. We must continually seek an answer to the question; How can we best build a nation that offers its citizens equal opportunity?

However, despite scientific evidence and primary historical documents, Americans continue to resist acknowledging our historical and contemporary racial inequalities. With the rhetoric of banning certain knowledge in school, we start to wonder where the cult really begins and ends.

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