

The Republican "Base," the followers of Donald Trump, are scornful of "elites," by which they mean educated. Elites once included the rich and powerful, but these categories don't bother the true believers as much as the "intellectuals."

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the product of scholar-advocates in the 1970s and 1980s at university level, who were interested in exploring how law and other forms of public policy could secure and protect civil rights, yet simultaneously codify racial discriminations and hierarchy.

The purpose of such studies was to open discussions and debates over how American institutions have contributed to the Black citizens' lag in enjoying equal civil rights in our society. It was most certainly not a platform for brainwashing elementary school children into being ashamed of their white ancestors enslaving black people, as the MAGA enthusiasts fear.

Politicians have frightened voters that elementary schools are making white students ashamed of being white and black students resentful. School teachers, already exhausted by the COVID pandemic and teaching remotely, are now resuming their teaching, finding children insecure and damaged by their enforced home schooling.

Teachers are now under attack at parent meetings by ignorant and violent advocates of removing all references to the black experience from teaching history or literature, books most of them have never read themselves. Critical Race Theory has been deliberately falsified and used as a cudgel to curry GOP votes.

It is impossible to ignore the reality of black experiences in today's America. It is a mixed picture. The educated have embraced Black professionals as colleagues, as we see in government, journalism, the military, the sciences, and law. Even ordinary White Americans have grown accustomed to seeing TV commercials in which people of color and White individuals socialize, intermarry, and appear to share the same cultural values. In addition, sports and entertainment have mostly integrated, with none of the nasty reactions when color barriers were first breached. (Think of Jackie Robinson in Baseball, for example.)

But total equality is not yet a reality in many areas of Black experience. We still have troubled inner cities, worse health outcomes, lower life expectancy, poorer schools, food deserts, and red-lining real estate barriers to accumulating wealth. "Driving while Black" is a reality for many, stopped and harshly interrogated by some police officers.

Critical Race Theory proposes four tenets:

Tenet 1: Race is a social concept, not a scientific reality. Human beings are one single species, characterized by the possibility of intermarriage and child bearing regardless of skin color or hair quality.

Tenet 2: Racism (antipathy toward those with particular skin color or sometimes religion), is a reality. Racism is particularly perpetuated through social processes (education, health, justice, economics) and learned antipathy toward those seemingly "different" from themselves.

Tenet 3: Because the differential treatment of individuals based upon racial classification is embedded within social systems and institutions including public policy and law racism is commonplace rather than rare and aberrant. It is a real thing.

Tenet 4: CRT rightly asserts that there is a need to better represent in research, the media, and policy advocacy and reform work on how racism in all of its manifestations is experienced by people in ways that matter, including consequences in physical and mental health.

In sum, CRT provides a framework for unpacking and understanding the fact that racial differences have important social outcomes, including illness, life expectancy, and other health indicators that persist in the United States and other societies, despite advances in civil rights.

Equality before the law, where the law doesn't care who's standing before them, whatever their skin color, their ethnicity, their national origin, or gender, is a bedrock principle to achieving a society where fairness is going to happen.

This is heavy stuff, unlike materials taught in elementary and high schools. However, it is not a dangerous thing to expose all children to the stories and histories of all of us who are now Americans. Walking in the shoes of others is always a good way to promote the sort of empathy and kindness we would like in our future citizens.

679 words

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