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# Critical Race Theory and Adult Education

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## Abstract

Critical race theory (CRT) was developed to examine the persistence of racism. This literature review attempts to understand CRT as it has been applied in related fields such as higher education and possible reasons for its limited application in adult education theorizing about race and racism. This analysis of CRT is framed against a backdrop of the evolution of an adult education discourse on race and racism over several decades and distinguishes CRT from other racial theories that have been used in the field. CRT tenets are discussed using examples that demonstrate how CRT reveals areas of racism left untouched by other forms of theorizing. The author provides a critique of CRT, caveats for those adult educators who might choose to use it, and examples of areas within the field of adult education that might benefit from a CRT lens.

## Keywords

critical race theory, race, literature review

There has been much discussion in recent years on critical race theory (CRT) and what it offers for understanding race and racism. There has been speculation about the benefits of a CRT analysis to adult educators (Peterson, 1999; Rocco & Gallagher, 2004); however, based on the fact that many students, practitioners, and faculty colleagues continue to ask me, "What is critical race theory?" an understanding of it apparently has not entered the everyday world of many students, practitioners, and faculty. Given the significant adult education discourse regarding the influence of race and racism emanating from perspectives such as Africentricism (which is used interchangeably with Afrocentrism in the literature) (Colin & Guy, 1998), as well as Black feminist thought (Johnson-Bailey, 2001b; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996), it was surprising to find a dearth of adult education literature using CRT as a theoretical framework.

CRT appeared on the legal scene in the mid-1970s (Ladson-Billings, 1998) as legal scholars reexamined racism's persistence post-civil rights legislation and was

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introduced to the general field of education in 1995 (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). There have been many discussions applying CRT to schooling and higher education within the past decade. However, thus far, there has been relatively limited application of this specific framework in adult education.

At its most elemental level, CRT can be defined as a critique of racial reform efforts; however, as we shall see, in its fullest elaboration a CRT framework mixes strategy, research method, and definitional premises. This mixing can make CRT difficult to understand. Furthermore, because CRT treats race as a social construct, many CRT scholars blend race and ethnicity and eschew the Black-White binary that has characterized American racial discourse. This too has muddied people's understanding of CRT and has contributed to a splintering of the movement that is discussed later. Reading the CRT literature can seem familiar yet unfamiliar, perhaps because CRT assembles premises from several disciplines familiar to educators and then reassembles these in one new framework. Moreover, because the framework emerges from the legal field, what is described as noteworthy for legal discourse is not necessarily so for educators.

My purpose in this article is primarily to provide a literature review of CRT and to consider its use for adult education. I will first provide a brief overview of discussions of race in adult education in relation to CRT; next I will briefly discuss the origins of CRT and the methodology of the review. This will provide the background to the primary purpose, which is to explore the core aspects of CRT. Finally, I will discuss and critique CRT and consider what it offers to the field of adult education.

## **Race, Adult Education, and Critical Race Theory**

There clearly has been considerable discussion of race and racism in adult education. It is important to first provide a brief overview of discussions of race in the field before considering what CRT might offer.

### *Race in Adult Education: A Brief Overview*

Starting with the Harlem and Atlanta experiments in Negro adult education (Guy, 1996) and the publication of the Bronze Booklets edited by Alain Locke in the 1930s (Johnson-Bailey, 2006), scholars in adult education persistently, if not consistently, address the effects of racism and raise concerns about our field's collective response. For example, in 1945, an entire issue of the *Journal of Negro Education* was devoted to adult education and the Negro. In that issue, Reddick pronounced, "It is plain that the movement for adult education in the United States has not only done little to improve race relations but has never conceived of this as an objective of its endeavor" (pp. 489-490). However, contemporary scholars have made significant attempts to reshape the adult education canon by documenting efforts to address race and racism by adult educators like Alain Locke (Guy, 1996) and educators of adults like the many examples provided in *Freedom Road* (Peterson, 1996). During the late 1960s and

early 1970s, *Adult Education Quarterly* published several research articles demonstrating efforts to reduce the prejudice of White teachers (Rhyne, 1973; Rubin, 1967). But for the most part, between the 1950s and 1980s, adult education literature focused minimally, if at all, on race and/or racism (Johnson-Bailey, 2001a).

The 1990s brought a new generation of work dealing with race in the field. Hayes and Colin (1994) broke significant ground with a *New Directions* publication centered on racism and sexism and how these interlocking "isms" impacted the academic achievement and economic success of African Americans and women. Since then, further discussions on race include Colin's (1996) Africentric analyses of Garvey's "selfethnic reflectors" (p. 41), Sheared's (1999) consideration of "polyrhythmic realities" that affect African American women's learning, and many examples of culturally relevant adult education (Guy, 1999). All begin to explain the complexity of learning environments in which African American and other nondominant persons participate. Afrocentric feminist epistemology as applied by Sheared (1994) and Black feminist thought as applied by Johnson-Bailey (2001b) model ways that racially based frameworks can be applied to the adult education classroom and be used to frame the particular nature of Black women's higher education experience. These frameworks capture the intersection of race, gender, and class; moreover, they forecast elements evident in CRT, for example, the centrality of experiential knowledge as a criterion for determining meaning.

Furthermore, we are developing evidence of significant historic efforts of Black adults educating a race, in Peterson's *Freedom Road* (1996) and Denton's *Booker T. Washington and the Adult Education Movement* (1993), along with Rachal's (1998) work on adult education during the civil rights movement. We have excellent examinations of the way race affects the academic experience of African Americans and the way race can operate in higher education classrooms (Johnson-Bailey & Lee, 2005). As social scientists began theorizing Whiteness, adult educators began to explore and challenge White privilege (Manglitz, 2003) and to reexamine the extent to which critical theory can effectively address racism (Brookfield, 2003).

Although these contributions are constructs in our field's knowledge base that deal with race and racism, the sense that such perspectives have yet to fully penetrate the epistemology of adult education remains in question. More precisely, the 2000 *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education* (Wilson & Hayes, 2000) is the first handbook to devote a chapter to examining race and racism (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000) as opposed to racial groups (e.g., educating the Negro, Native American, etc.) and how the topic of race or racism might be presented in preparing adult education practitioners. In other words, it was only in 2000 that a discussion of racism secured a prominent place in what can arguably be considered an epistemological core of adult education.

By contrast, the wider field of education has been a bit more proactive in examining racial justice issues, particularly from an epistemological and CRT perspective. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), critical race theorists who have focused on schooling, posit that the concept of race is undertheorized in education; in other words, in their estimation, gender and class theories alone have failed to explain the lack of

achievement and academic success of African American children. By this, these critical race theorists are suggesting that race, and especially racism, are seldom central to an analysis of the lack of success and/or achievement of African Americans; more often race is used as a demographic variable. One might wonder whether this is often true in adult education as well. To consider what CRT might have to offer the field, it is important to briefly introduce its origins and definitions.

### *CRT: Origins, Definitions, and Connections to Adult Education*

CRT, alternately referred to as a theoretical and/or interpretive framework as well as a movement (Monaghan, 1993; West, 1995), draws together premises and strategies derived largely from critical theory, but related directly to racism, and is being increasingly used by educational scholars to analyze education (Dixson & Rousseau 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Conceived as an oppositional scholarship within mainstream legal scholars' discourse (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xvii), CRT stems from a group known as critical legal scholars (CLS)—a mix of leftist law faculty, students, and practitioners. Legal scholars of color, although they agreed with CLS that race is a social construct, also believed race held a "material dimension" in people's lives. Thirty-five law scholars united at the Critical Race Theory Workshop explicitly to synthesize "a theory that, while grounded in critical theory, was responsive to the realities of racial politics in America" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xxvii), coining the term "Critical Race Theory" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xxvii).

Derrick Bell is considered the father of CRT. His seminal book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992), combines allegories with legal findings sketching the outlines of an American society where liberalism is a façade, a place where racial inequalities will never be rectified and only addressed to the extent that Whites see themselves as threatened by the status quo. Bell resigned from Harvard University's law school in 1992 in protest that no African American female law faculty was hired during his 23-year tenure. Bell's legacy to CRT is skepticism about civil rights discourse, an activist orientation, and counter-story-telling. Emerging as it did in response to the civil rights movement, when the country's consciousness was focused on Black/White relationships and rights, CRT has seen the bulk of its scholarship centered on the African American experience.

Taylor (1998) offers a concise definition of CRT, which is useful for our discussion here: "As a form of oppositional scholarship, CRT challenges the experience of whites as the normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color" (p. 122). The author further notes that context "is crucial for understanding racial dynamics, particularly the way that current inequalities are connected to earlier, more overt, practices of racial exclusion" (p. 122).

In light of its background and Taylor's definition, it is clear that CRT is not the same as some of the theoretical and research discussions of race in the field. It differs from Africentrism (Colin & Guy, 1998) and from racializing criticality (Brookfield,

2003), although one could say it shares theoretical space with both concepts in the following ways. CRT is related to Africentricism in that theorists believe the African American experience is a distinct phenomenon that merits a framework using their experience in analyzing American law, policy, and institutions. Furthermore, CRT draws on some Africentric values such as community, inclusion, and collaboration (Ladson-Billings, 2000) and situates itself in an African American intellectual tradition with scholar activists like W. E. B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). At the same time, like critical theory, legal scholars of color conceive CRT as critiquing social structures and forms of theorizing that legitimize them in order to make just, systemic change (Bernstein, 1995, p. 11). But CRT is distinct from Africentrism in that it does not base its tenets solely on the *Nguzo Saba* (Colin & Guy, 1998), does not propose to be a worldview, and critiques salient issues of the racial reform movement particular to the United States. CRT is distinct from efforts to racialize criticality (Brookfield, 2003); CRT's purpose is different. Efforts to racialize the notion of criticality comprise an intellectual project with the broad objectives to, first, demonstrate the relevance of Marxism and neo-Marxism to racial analysis (West, cited in Brookfield, 2003), and, second, to design a theory of struggle drawn from constructs of critical theory suggested by the "Frankfurt School" (Outlaw, 1983).

Adult education scholars have addressed issues of race and gender using Afrocentric feminist epistemology (Sheard, 1994) and Black feminist thought (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996). Although Crenshaw (1995) has drawn the intersecting lines of gender and race within CRT, the focus of CRT remains squarely on an analysis of the persistence of racism, whereas Black feminist thought centers on explaining the significant and unique nature of the doubly marginalized Black woman. However, both CRT and Afrocentric/Black feminist epistemologies centralize African American experience as the unit of analysis.

CRT theorists in education seek to explain the continued inequities that people of color in education experience (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18), which implies that although scholars have used race to analyze social inequity, "the intellectual salience of this theorizing has not been *systematically* [italics added] employed in the analysis of educational inequality" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 44). This is certainly the point that Peterson (1999) highlighted when she outlined areas of adult education that could benefit from a CRT analysis. When Guy (1999) advocated a culturally relevant pedagogy, he prefigured aspects of CRT to the extent that he encouraged instructors and students in self-examination of their cultural identity; however, CRT when applied to the classroom is more concerned with directly highlighting racism—its pervasiveness and how it shapes much of the American perspective. Clearly, CRT is more than pedagogy. Critical race theorists see themselves involved in transformation of the current inequitable educational system to one that contributes to the success of all people of color (Tate, 2005). Neither CRT nor critical theory is, in reality, a single theory. Like critical theory, CRT is a collection of related premises defining an interpretive framework. This will be discussed further once the methodology for actually conducting the literature review is explained.

## Literature Review Methodology

Three parameters were used to screen articles related to CRT: (a) peer-reviewed journals, (b) time frame, and (c) acknowledgement within the text that the author understood CRT as an integrated framework rather than a racialized version of critical theory. Peer-reviewed journals were used because they represent an academic discourse of experienced scholars in the field of education regarding CRT. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* is the exception; although this publication is considered a book, without its inclusion no adult education literature would be represented. The 12-year time span allows for two key dates: Ladson-Billings and Tate's seminal 1995 article introducing CRT to educators and Elizabeth Peterson's 1999 introduction of CRT to adult education. Included articles acknowledge premises that key CRT theorists identify as part of a CRT framework. Articles examining CRT as research method were excluded. ERIC Abstracts, ERIC OCLC, and Wilson Omnifile databases were searched using the terms *critical race theory* and *adult education*, as well as the related areas of *human resource development*, *adult basic education*, *higher education*, and *continuing education*. The total number of items was reduced from 86 to 20 using my criteria above. One article located by happenstance was added, raising the total to 21.

Overwhelmingly, the articles represent higher education—16 total. Only 2 conceptual pieces are located in the broad field of adult education—Peterson (1999) and Rocco and Gallagher (2004). Adults are the subject of only 4 of the 21 articles identified: faculty, 3 (Burden, Harrison, & Hodge, 2005; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Williams & Evans-Winter, 2005); and professional practitioners, 1 (McDowell & Jeris, 2004). All 8 of the empirical studies are qualitative. The number of participants in the 8 studies range from 3 to 34, with participant selection unexplained in 2.

Clearly, few articles on CRT emanate from adult education or center on adult experiences; however, through a studied review, we can begin to not only define CRT but also determine its relevancy and usefulness for adult education.

## Core Premises Addressed in Reviewed Literature

The core premises of CRT can best be explained if one understands its evolution. As CRT evolved and migrated from legal scholarship to education, shifts in descriptions of its core premises further clouded comprehension. So it is no surprise that several authors set forth what are variously called CRT tenets, themes, characteristics, and premises. The most frequently cited in education literature are Solórzano (1997), Ladson-Billings (1998), DeCuir and Dixson (2004), and Matsuda (in Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

### *Experiential Knowledge*

Early legal critical race theorists rejected traditional dictates to author their scholarship from a distance as detached observers (Calmore, 1995), as do early debates within

education in rejecting the mono-perspective of positivistic science. Furthermore, within CRT, legal scholars of color posited that they were being inauthentic to the extent that their scholarship did not convey their own unique histories, and some argued that White scholars may lack the passion and be ineffective advocates for persons of color, thus discouraging Whites from using a CRT framework (Delgado, 1995). As CRT extended into education, the use of experiential knowledge within CRT higher education literature took several forms. The literature reviewed manifests experiential knowledge in three ways: (a) to racially position authors, (b) to provide backgrounding for using fictive/composite characters, and (c) to substantiate collecting the stories of students or faculty.

Often CRT scholars acknowledge their race, as do several authors in this review, specifically Lynch (2006), McDowell and Jeris (2004), and Williams and Evans-Winter (2005), in order to foreground race in their scholarship and emphasize that race matters in forming knowledge. McDowell and Jeris, both White, present their race as a limitation to their study and critique other marriage and family scholars for not presenting their race more prominently because it affects the way "research, theory and practice" are understood (p. 90). Along these lines, Calmore, one of the early CRT legal scholars, writes, "As people of color, we recognize the centrality of race in a social order that is maintained and perpetuated in significant ways by the rule of law. As scholars, our writing acknowledges this centrality that contextualizes our work" (Calmore, 1994, p. 320).

Experiences of people of color that belie the meritocratic, the so-called "color-blind," and liberal "majoritarian" (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) story are also referred to as *counter-stories*. Counter-stories also include parables and family histories (Solórzano, 1997), as well as stories collected from research participants, as Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) do when examining microaggressions that Black students experience at predominantly White universities. Lastly, CRT scholars tell counter-stories through fictive characters within their scholarly work to highlight particularly meaningful points (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). Interestingly, creating fictive characters in CRT scholarship has not been critiqued as much as the general technique of telling counter-stories. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) as well as Donnor (2005) lodge their complaint regarding the storytelling trend. Specifically, Donnor says, "Unfortunately, the majority of critical race studies in education are too preoccupied with 'telling a story' to explain the educational experiences and outcomes of African Americans and other students of color" (p. 62). Although education scholars do not critique fictive characters, Solórzano and Yosso (2002b) nonetheless defend this technique as "composite characters" rather than fictive (p. 36). In their words, the "characters are grounded in real-life experience and actual empirical data and are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life not fiction" (p. 36). For example, in higher education literature, Claudia—a Chicana civil rights attorney—is a character Solórzano and Yosso (2002a) use to explore the lines of legal reasoning that inform racially based higher education legal decisions from *Bakke* (in 1978) to *Grutter v.*

*Bollinger*, when, in 2003, the Supreme Court upheld the University of Michigan's use of affirmative action to diversify their student body. The authors recount in their footnotes the data that inform the scenario in which Claudia converses with Justice Thurgood Marshall and Ruby Puentes (a Latinized Ruby Bridges) about the *Grutter* case. The purpose of this conversation is to reveal the complex of routes, cul-de-sacs, and dead ends down which educational equity and access decisions have traveled, including questioning the ground-breaking *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Remembering that slave narratives are counternarratives, we know that the counternarrative is not new. However, recall that CRT's original purposes are grounded in issues of race representation in legal scholarship. Thus, the aim of counter-story-telling within CRT was originally to restructure legal scholarship; counter-stories were intended to illuminate, by contrast, the majoritarian story represented by the law. Counter-stories are used to demonstrate that color blindness, from a CRT perspective, inevitably obscures the ways in which African Americans and other people of color are still being disadvantaged. Experiential knowledge as a premise of CRT can be manifested in several ways, as demonstrated here. It is based on the central premise of CRT, which is that racism is endemic, a premise we turn to now.

### **Endemic Racism**

From a CRT perspective, in order to pass civil rights legislation, the majority of White Americans needed to *not* see themselves as racists; thus, racism was construed by the legal system as aberrant, intentional behavior, perpetrated by a conscious wrongdoer (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiv). So the belief that racism is endemic is another way of stating CRT's basic assumption that racism is normal, not aberrant, in the United States (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998), which calls for different strategies in addressing racism—strategies targeting conditions of our society in addition to the actions perpetrated by “the isolated redneck” (Delgado, 1995). Like Frantz Fanon, Derrick Bell believes that racist structures are embedded in the “psychology, economy, society and culture of the modern world” (Bell, 1992, p. xiv). Bell (1992) supports his premise with quantitative trends to show that strides made by African Americans had been lost by the 1990s. Solórzano's (1997) construal of endemic racism lays heavier emphasis on racism and race as intersectional constructs than other frameworks. He limited intersectionality to gender and class (p. 6) but has consistently defined racism as extending beyond the Black-White binary (p. 8). By 2005, he added other aspects of identity, specifically language, generation, and sexuality (Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005, p. 274). Solórzano is arguably the most influential CRT scholar in higher education, having written or coauthored seven of the articles reviewed here. In almost a third of the articles reviewed, racism is treated from an intersectional perspective. For example, Crenshaw (1995) acknowledges in her seminal explanation that neither the discourse of sexism nor racism alone is adequate to fully articulate the experiences of women of color.

Intersectionality contributes to the conceptualization of TribalCrit, which, along with CRT, frames Castagno and Lee's (2007) study of Native Americans. TribalCrit positions colonization as endemic and posits that Indigenous people are not only racialized but also have a unique history and political relationship with the federal government, both of which are central to analysis of educational policies and practices (Brayboy, 2005, cited in Castagno & Lee, 2007).

Several of the authors using Solórzano's 2005 CRT framework (Solórzano et al., 2005) note that discourse on race must be broadened to include a wider range of variables and conditions beyond the Euro/African American experiences (Yosso, 2006). Concerns about broadening the scope of CRT's race frame indicate perhaps the emergence of two generations of CRT. First-generation CRT focuses mainly on material manifestations of racism as means to argue for social justice and the inclusion of heretofore marginalized voices into the debates on "race, racism, law and society" (Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn, & Arona, 2006, p. 266). Second-generation CRT scholars "have taken Bell, Delgado, Williams and Crenshaw's ideas and extended them to address issues of gender, ethnicity, language, culture, sexuality, and other key markers of difference" (Morfin et al., 2006, p. 266). This matter is not taken lightly, particularly by Delgado (2003), who pointedly says, "If the main thing one is interested in is terms and categories, then what more interesting ones than those that apply to you and your group? Thus, Critical Race Theory (CRT) splintered into a series of subgroups" (pp. 127-128).

Writing from an adult education perspective, Rocco and Gallagher (2004) take up the covert affect of the normalcy of racism in describing the "perpetrator perspective," a concept from CRT attributed to Freeman (1995, cited in Rocco & Gallagher, 2004). They discuss how this perspective allows White faculty to escape responsibility and accountability for racism by defining racism as an overt act. Rocco and Gallagher emphasize that because White faculty assume no accountability, they are continuously at risk of unfairly discriminating.

When Ladson-Billings (1998) introduced CRT to education, one of her suggested applications was in teacher training programs. Five articles in this review specifically address the challenge that such programs face in preparing what appear to be predominantly White and female college students to effectively teach predominantly African American and Latino/a learners in urban settings. All of these studies examine how to talk about racism to classes of White students who are the primary beneficiaries of racism; essentially, this becomes a question of how to best address White privilege. Marx (2004), although she draws only tangentially on CRT frameworks, uses the premise of the normality of racism to ground her personal challenges helping students to identify and discuss Whiteness. Lynch (2006) uses CRT as a theoretical framework for her educational foundations course; as a result, racism becomes the primary unit of analysis in her course. For Solórzano and Yosso (2001) and Solórzano (1997), the endemic nature of racism is not only the foundation for the racial stereotypes that preservice teachers may carry into their classrooms, but it, along with a renewed appreciation for the value of nondominant people's experiential knowledge, challenges the deficit discourse that preservice teachers and educators in general engage

in. Solórzano (1997) describes CRT's position on endemic racism this way: It has (a) micro and macro components, (b) institutional and individual forms, (c) conscious and unconscious elements, and (d) a cumulative impact on both the individual and group (Davis, 1989, and Lawrence, 1987, cited in Solórzano, 1997, p. 6).

Solórzano et al. (2000) conduct an empirical investigation of racial microaggressions as those "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of Blacks by offenders" (Pierce, cited in Solórzano, 1997, p. 11). Using qualitative data from 10 focus groups totaling 34 African American students divided across three elite predominantly White campuses, the authors found that even when the campus climate appears benign, the Black students experience microaggressions that lead to feelings of self-doubt, frustration, isolation, and in some cases transferal to a historically Black college. The authors found that the students created "counter-spaces" into which to retreat from the pressures of overt discrimination and covert microaggressions. A provocative question the authors pose is whether the burden of covert racism experienced by students of color should be acknowledged by awarding them added consideration towards admission to graduate or professional school (p. 72).

### *Critique of Liberalism*

Bell (1992) explains that civil rights laws in America have become "deified" in the following way: "The worship of equality rules as having absolute power benefits whites by preserving a benevolent but fictional self-image, and such worship benefits blacks by preserving hope" (p. 101). Because mainstream legal discourse uses the "perpetrator perspective" (Freeman, cited in Crenshaw et al., 1995) in construing racism as discrete acts of racial discrimination based on the "irrelevant" attribute of race, it is but a short step for legal scholars to embrace the ideal of color blindness as the guide to racial enlightenment (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xv). Liberalists also can support their position using Dr. King's rejoinder that a person be judged "by the content of his character not by the color of his skin" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xv). Shifting the critique of liberalism from civil rights law to education, Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) parallels the multicultural movement in education with the liberal approach taken in civil rights law, leveling a CRT critique of the multicultural paradigm as "a liberal ideology offering no radical change in the current order" (p. 56). A hallmark of critical race theorists is their respectful critique of the civil rights movement's incremental approach to racial reform when what is really needed, in their estimation, is restructuring institutions and systems. Despite their critique, solutions are infrequently heard from CRT theorists.

Although almost half of the studies in this review imply a critique of liberalism, seven make their critique explicit: Castagno and Lee (2007), Solórzano et al. (2005), Yosso (2006), Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002), Solórzano and Yosso (2001), Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), and McDowell and Jeris (2004). For example, Solórzano et al. (2005) use Justice O'Connor's forecast of the elimination of race in higher education admissions by 2028 as their impetus to use CRT in identifying how

Latino/a students are being lost in transitioning from community college to the university. The authors intend to demonstrate how seemingly race-neutral policies and institutional structures limit Latino/a students' achievement. However, their argument is undermined by anthropomorphizing the university as purposeful in its nonsupport. Solórzano et al. do provide evidence demonstrating the disparity between the numbers of Latino/a students who enter community colleges and the number transferring to universities. They reference other studies documenting poor community college advisement, lack of financial support, and use of standardized testing as barriers for Latino/as, but their conclusion of deliberate *intention* is not supported. Conclusions like this result in unnecessary "otherizing" that antagonizes and can easily turn away the very persons who most need to hear the message CRT analysis presents.

Castagno and Lee (2007) more effectively state that their use of TribalCrit

pushes us to recognize how these policies and practices are part of a legacy of racism and colonization—a legacy that unfortunately will not be disrupted by relying on the good intentions of those in positions of power. (p. 10)

Castagno and Lee's study found that their university's position regarding diversity is more concerned with self-interest than social justice. A social justice position would result in a clearly delineated prohibition against Native American mascots and logos, whereas the university's existing position is (a) to "discourage" such depictions and (b) not to schedule athletic games with colleges using such depictions—unless said team has a "long standing commitment" to play against their college (p. 7). Equivocation is one example the authors use to demonstrate the university's unwillingness to disrupt the status quo.

Authors who make explicit a critique of liberalism characterize the dominant ideology as having a delusional color-blind, race-neutral, and meritocratic notion of their field or their HEI's (higher education institution's) procedures. Authors address dominant ideology in a variety of areas: dominant faculty ideology that informally prefers publications to be unidisciplinary as opposed to interdisciplinary (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002), teacher preparation programs where dominant racial stereotypes are identified and challenged (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), and the self-defeating resistance perspective frequently used to characterize Latino/a students (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Yosso's (2006) community cultural wealth model, in its identification of resources for empowering students of color, critiques the dominant ideology that implies communities of color are deficit. She believes that CRT directs the researchers' lens towards inclusion of omitted voices and experiences of people of color while compelling scholars to challenge deficit-based ideologies. Yosso's model, similar to asset-based development, seeks to nurture and empower people of color by delineating sources of capital that contribute to community cultural wealth.

### Whiteness as Property

A classic example of Whiteness as property from early critical race theorists is Harris's (1995) description of her grandmother passing for White in order to be hired by a Chicago department store circa 1930. Harris explains the origins of this concept best when she states,

Slavery produced a peculiar, mixed category of property and humanity—a hybrid with inherent instabilities that were reflected in its treatment and ratification by the law. The dual and contradictory character of slaves as property and persons was exemplified in the Representation Clause of the Constitution. (p. 278)

Harris now positions Whiteness as property considering the three rights of all legally defined property as they might relate to Whiteness: the rights of use, disposition, and possession. The right of possession extends to exclusion rights. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) use the property right of possession to demonstrate how White possession rights could explain segregated schools—an absolute right to exclude Black children from access to education.

Whiteness as property was CRT's least used tenet in articles reviewed. McDowell and Jeris (2004) state that, from White people's privileged position, their expectations are "tantamount to property that is protected and gives the owner the right to exclude" (p. 83). Morfin et al. (2006) point out that the 1978 *Bakke* decision should be viewed as a case where Bakke's expectation of admission is equivalent to White property rights being protected. Lynch (2006) and Morfin et al. illustrate the connection between race, the monetary value of property, and how race-related property value influences school quality. In Morfin et al.'s view, this ultimately influences college admission. Brady, Eatman, and Parker (2000) probably draw the clearest relationship between the concept of White property rights and funding disparities between White and Black publicly funded colleges. They draw parallels between the *Bakke* decision as a case about protecting White property rights and legal decisions (*U.S. v. Fordice* and *Ayers v. Fordice*) that protect White institutions as "property" for White students while ruling against historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and African American property interests (p. 299). Brady et al. present Whiteness as property as part of the CRT framework and central to the funding inequity they analyze. McDowell and Jeris describe this concept, but it is not key to the CRT-based literature analysis they conduct. Morfin et al. elaborate upon Whiteness as property. On one hand, their explanation provides a conceptual backdrop for their position that, despite the *Grutter v. Bollinger* ruling supportive of race-sensitive admissions, selective colleges have failed to actively recruit minorities. On the other hand, they present Whiteness as property without a supporting link to their conclusions. This demonstrates a problem apparent in several articles that present a construct or sometimes an entire CRT framework without linking it substantively to the article's findings or conclusions (examples are Cooper, Massey, & Graham, 2006; Burden et al., 2005; Lynch, 2006; Williams & Evans-Winter, 2005).

## Interest Convergence

From a CRT perspective, interest convergence both explains a racial reality and offers a strategy for surmounting racial obstacles. Interest convergence holds that racial injustice will decline only when White policy makers believe it is in their best interest; furthermore, any policy to benefit Blacks that threatens White superior standing will be declared unnecessary (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 18). Bell (1995) derives the concept, at least partially, from his experience when *Brown v. Board of Education* succeeded. He posits the ruling was more an effort to boost U.S. international prestige among third world countries during the cold war than a moral argument for racial justice. Three articles use interest convergence to analyze issues within higher education. Donnor (2005) applies the principle to reveal how commercialism of college sports sometimes undermined African American athletes' education. Castagno and Lee (2007) use interest convergence to show that a university's policies on Native mascots and ethnic fraud (unauthenticated Native Americans) are based in the university's self-interest rather than a goal of equity and therefore fail to challenge the status quo. Brady et al. (2000) demonstrate the relationship of race, money, and its influence on higher education policy. Viewing the legal history of the public HBCUs through an interest convergence lens, these authors expose (a) a persistent refusal of states to implement court rulings requiring the enhancement of HBCUs via increased fiscal equity and (b) an environment in which directives to dismantle segregated institutions were interpreted as the dismantling of the HBCU. Only Brady et al. offer recommendations for change, calling for fiscal equity between HBCUs and traditionally White institutions (TWIs), the enhancement of HBCUs, and the restructuring of the schooling system so that public colleges become integrated into a K-16 system.

None of the articles view interest convergence as a strategy to overcome racial barriers, even though Bell (1992) implies that interest convergence not only explains White resistance to racial equity but is a strategy used by nondominant persons.

## Interdisciplinarity

The interdisciplinary premise of CRT is familiar to adult educators because in our applied field we draw from a cross-section of sociology, psychology, economics, and anthropology as well as the arts to understand and enhance our practice. However, in legal discourse, this is not the case. As Calmore (1995) writes, "In contrast to traditional scholarship, the focus [of CRT] is much more extralegal and contextual, less restricted by doctrinal analysis as a controlling center" (p. 320). Nevertheless, education scholars continue to make special note of CRT's interdisciplinary nature including ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, and the law (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, p. 156), with particular emphasis on the importance of providing historical context for current topics (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

The articles that make special effort to place their subject matter into historical context are primarily those that also incorporate legal rulings (Brady et al., 2000;

Donnor, 2005; Morfin et al., 2006); court cases provide the historical depth for their topics. Donnor (2005) draws not only on court cases (discussed below) but also on sociological and social psychological theory. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) demonstrate that the media was an effective tool to draw preservice teachers' racist preconceptions into the open. McDowell and Jeris (2004) are exceptional because interdisciplinary discourse became integral to their analysis of professional articles about race and racism. They found marriage and family therapy underutilizes knowledge from other disciplines that might aid practitioners in challenging racism. They are particularly adamant that "situating race in an historical perspective is important not only in re-narrating stories of survival and resistance, but also in recognizing how the history of race relations in the U.S. supports contemporary racism" (p. 91).

### The Law

Despite Ladson-Billings's (1998) caveat that education scholars remain close to the legal foundations of CRT, by 2004 DeCuir and Dixson believed the counter-story dominated the CRT education literature—so much so that they documented, in literature review fashion, those scholars uniting law and education. Similarly, I found only four articles linking law with topics in adult and higher education: Morfin et al. (2006), Donnor (2005), Solórzano and Yosso (2002a), and Brady et al. (2000). Oddly, however, Lynch (2006) notes the importance of Ladson-Billings's (1998) caveat but never discusses it or provides any legal grounding in her own scholarship.

In *Grutter v. Bollinger* in 2003 (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a; Morfin et al., 2006), the Supreme Court upholds the University of Michigan law school's use of affirmative action as a flexible factor in admissions but do not support their undergraduate admissions' "mechanistic" use in *Gratz v. Bollinger* in 2003 (Morfin et al., 2006). Morfin et al. (2006) use the *Grutter* findings to question California's lack of affirmative action in its university system. These researchers note the simultaneous drop in African American and Hispanic student enrollment at seven state colleges. However, their generalization to universities nationwide is unsubstantiated by their localized evidence.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002a) use the *Grutter* case to explore the status of affirmative action and civil rights in the 21st century through a fictive dialogue between Ruby Puentes, Claudia (Chicana attorney), and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. The article demonstrates the authors' concern that a color-blind constitution will serve to reinscribe discrimination. In 1992, the Court found that states once operating officially sanctioned dual higher education systems must surpass race-neutral admission policies to dismantle the dual system. Many believed this ruling threatened HBCUs as, due to historic underfunding, they had fewer assets and greater liabilities, which hindered their ability to recruit White students.

In *Ayers v. Fordice*, settled in 2001 ("Leaders Resign Themselves," 2001), the Court decided that the state of Mississippi would enhance their three publicly funded HBCUs with \$105 million dollars, split among them. The trigger for the funding was maintenance of a 10% White enrollment for 2 years (Brady et al., 2000). Brady et al.'s

(2000) article is an example of the kind of analytical thinking spurred by the CRT framework. The article demonstrates Mississippi's historic, inequitable implementation of legal rulings that the authors believe ultimately aims to reduce Blacks' access to higher education, accomplished not only via historical funding disparities between funded HBCUs and TWIs but also via a history of generally inequitable schooling systems. Unfolding the legal history relevant to eradicating dual university systems as well as the authors' efforts to contrast Mississippi's inequitable funding with university funding nationally is challenging to follow. However, the authors raise an important question in the post-*Fordice* era: Given historical resource inequity, why were no HBCUs designated as flagship universities for any state?

Donnor (2005) embeds a CRT analysis of African American athletes in the legalities of college athletics. Using two legal suits filed by male African American athletes, in 1971 (*Taylor v. Wake Forest*) and 1990 (*Ross v. Creighton*), respectively, he demonstrates how the seemingly *neutral* space of college athletics and the supposedly *color-blind* nature of the laws and policies influenced the universities' educational shortfalls regarding these athletes. Briefly, Donnor examines cases where Black male athletes charged that their predominantly White universities (Wake Forest and Creighton) failed to support the student academically while supporting them athletically. Both plaintiffs lost their cases.

Linking legal rulings with racial issues in higher education provides a unique context for scholarship because the law is a series of responses based on a distribution of political and economic power, bearing in mind that legal changes require a political base of support. Legal rulings provide a kind of ideology regarding race and racism in America that can inform scholarship. Legal rulings can constitute the meta-story in contrast to the counter-story of the daily lives of people of color. This said, pulling legal findings into a research study is no easy technical task. Skillful writing and a firm grounding in legal literature are necessary so that the study's outcome is not lost in the detail telling the legal story. Donnor (2005) does this well. Solórzano & Yosso (2002) use fictive characters who can more easily articulate in dialogue what legal rulings take paragraphs to tell—and yet fictive characters not only raise credibility concerns but also challenge the writer's deftness.

### *Social Justice Orientation*

Solórzano et al. (2005) borrow the following elaborated definition of social justice:

[an] agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation status, and class subordination (Matsuda, 1996). In higher education, these theoretical frameworks are conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 275)

In each article Solórzano authored or coauthored, social justice is identified as a part of the CRT framework (Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Delgado

Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002a). Solórzano and Yosso (2002b) cite a definition that incorporates praxis and alludes to an action orientation; Dixson and Rousseau (2005) echo this in outlining a CRT framework and underscore it in describing Bell's departure from Harvard. However, it sometimes appears that stating a social justice orientation becomes its own evidence. Evidence of linkages between the academy and the community is particularly sparse. Although Williams and Evans-Winter (2005), for example, mention social justice several times in framing their examination of teacher preparation for predominantly White preservice teachers, they never define it. However, a notable exception is Solórzano and Yosso's research (2002a) substantiating campus discrimination in the *Grutter* case. The authors describe the contribution of the Intervenor testimony provided by students of color and the campus climate report based on Allen and Solórzano's work (cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a) documenting student struggles in a discriminatory campus racial climate. Another exception is McDowell and Jeris (2004), who explore the acknowledgement of racial injustice and/or advocacy of counterhegemonic/antiracist practice in their professional literature. Using their CRT-derived analytical framework, the authors identified numerous ways in which marriage and family therapists advocated for social justice in their individual practices. For example, therapists encouraged clients from racial minority groups to develop stories of strength and resistance or, in the case of non-native-English speakers, provided services in the client's native language.

### **Critique, Caveats, and Discussion**

It is important to highlight here that CRT emerged not only out of a frustration with the slow pace of change from the civil rights movement but from a dissatisfaction with critical theory's analysis of race and racism, a critique that also applies to adult education. At its core, CRT can be defined as a critique of the racial reform movement in the United States. Adult educators may be unclear about CRT's definition because its framework incorporates a mix of concepts, strategy, and method. Cole and Maisuria (2007) refine the definition of CRT by extracting method (i.e., counter-stories) and strategy (i.e., interest convergence) from core premises allowing the remaining tenets to stand as defining elements. CRT's evolution into first generation and second generation indicates the increasingly prominent position of the intersectionality premise. Consequently, CRT has splintered into a number of subgroups as scholars seek to broaden CRT's racial discourse beyond the Black-White binary. Presently, CRT is shape-shifting; therefore, it is important for adult educators inclined to apply it not to simply hone in on those areas that can be "nailed down," those areas that are relatively consistent across the CRT literature like counter-stories and endemic racism. Adult educators are already familiar with the concept of counter-stories that illumine by contrast the majoritarian story through works such as *Sistahs in College* (Johnson-Bailey, 2001b) and Colin's (1996) work framing the United Negro Improvement Association as adult education. These works imply the deep rootedness of racism within the halls of academe and in the history of our field.

The question is, does CRT add anything more? The potential power in CRT is its argument that U.S. racism is normative. Accepting this as the starting point for the analysis of racism shifts racism scholarship toward examining *seemingly race-neutral* laws, policies, social structures, and histories that may continue to disadvantage persons of color. Moreover, CRT specifically seeks to explain the *persistence* of racism despite the considerable efforts in past decades to eradicate it. CRT implies that in adult education as in schooling literature, a critique of the multiculturalism and diversity movements is required. CRT theorists note that even these seemingly worthy movements are flawed when they inadvertently or overtly advocate color blindness, relegate racism to overt racist acts, or simply fail to discuss either racism or power differentials based on race. As adult educators we can ask ourselves, Are we satisfied with the examination of racism in the multicultural and/or diversity courses we now offer?

CRT's critique of liberalism points toward the continued need for affirmative action. Central to CRT is consistent critique of meritocracy as a façade for racism. Although scholarship represented here demonstrates evidence supporting this critique, the question is whether we should still *aspire* toward a meritocratic system even though it may be hindered by racism's undertow? In this regard, CRT scholars reviewed here have offered little in the way of alternative systems to replace the ones they critique or solutions to address the problems they identify.

It might be argued that CRT is primarily a framework for analysis; however, Ladson-Billings (1998) expresses concern that CRT might become an intellectual toy; moreover, the emphasis Solórzano places on social justice suggests that at least these two CRT scholars expect more from CRT than an analysis of racism. Delgado (2003) mourns that the worst may already be realized, that CRT has become a discourse about discourse. On the other hand, Marx (2004) and Lynch (2006) provide evidence of CRT as an effective curriculum frame in college classrooms. These examples differ from culturally relevant adult education (Guy, 1999), Africentric models drawn from the Nguzo Saba (Colin & Guy, 1998), and Sheared's (1994) application of Afrocentric feminism to frame adult education curriculum. Those who have applied CRT to curriculum focused not on ways to strengthen and include the African American learner but how to inform White preservice teachers of not only their endemic racism but that of the schooling system they will enter. Racism, not inclusion, is the primary concern.

Overall, CRT is critiqued minimally in the literature examined, which is surprising given (a) Delgado's (1995) flashpoint suggestion that, in the name of experiential knowledge and the endemic nature of racism, White scholars be excluded from CRT theorizing; and (2) the frequent use of fictive/composite characters. The most prominent critique is that counter-story-telling is overused and legal rulings are underused. Only 8 of the 21 articles were empirical studies, and all but 1 was qualitative; thus, scholarship for the most part centers on the idiographic and emotionally resonant cases, and in very few instances (Castagno & Lee [2007] being the exception) were the data triangulated. Donnor (2005), a prominent CRT theorist, counters that CRT rejects objectivity and neutrality by privileging the experiences of people of color. I am not convinced that such a stance achieves the societal changes we want and that

CRT espouses. Finally, this last is not a critique of CRT but a caveat to those who use it. Because frameworks serve as standpoints (Collins, 1990), authors should provide an overview of the CRT framework to which they ascribe as tenets can vary and CRT continues to evolve. A framework is key to the readers' ability to assess an author's conceptualization. An even more important corollary is to avoid simply parroting a framework without tying concepts to it (examples of this problem include Cooper et al., 2006; Lynch, 2006; Williams & Evans-Winter, 2005).

## Implications

What does all this suggest for adult education theorizing, policy, and practice? Clearly, CRT's legal roots are an important tenet and a primary distinction from other theoretical frameworks. Legal concepts are tedious to write about and unfamiliar to us (and to most educators), which is, I suspect, why educational scholars tend to drop this tenet from the framework. However, policy is an excellent substitute for legal decisions and can provide a similar systemic analysis. Castagno and Lee (2007) and Donnor (2005) both effectively substitute institutional policy for legal decisions. Castagno et al. use their university's equivocation on policy decisions about ethnically offensive mascots to illustrate how institutional self-interest trumps social justice interests in their college. When the authors frame this issue as interest convergence, they reveal processes that allow racism to persist.

The wide array of adult education providers seems to mitigate against identifying a single policy or legal initiative that has had the equivalent influence of *Brown v. Board of Education* on the schooling system. Yet legal rulings such as the 1890 Morrill Act (the second Morrill Act), designed to fund Black land grant institutions and intended to create equity between White and Black land grants, has been underexamined in the field. By 1914, only 8.5% of the 1890 funds had been directed to Black land grant institutions (Kujovich, 1997).

Discussion of the 1890s is often omitted from adult education history, but this era is important in the way it shaped and continues to shape the 1890 institutions and their work with adults as well as how it has privileged the 1860 institutions. In general, there seems to be a decline in policy scholarship in the field, which may explain a lack of interest in applying a framework like CRT that, if applied fully, would be linked to policy or legal rulings. However, in continuing education, higher education, and human resource development (HRD) affirmative action policies, the multicultural and diversity movements seem ripe for examination with a CRT lens.

Although there are few explicit applications of CRT in adult education, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2000) use three concepts that are included in a CRT framework. For example, the authors call for movement away from a color-blind pedagogy while advocating a personal ethic of social justice. Social justice seems to be defined according to London's ideas (cited in Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000), indicating that educational opportunity alone is insufficient to address racial inequality. Rather, social and political restructuring is required (p. 153). Second, similar to a CRT analysis, the

authors have included a discussion of the normality of racism among White faculty and an implication that, therefore, exposure of this normality is needed to effectively examine the White privilege that contributes to racism. Third, the authors racially position themselves. This is an example of how elements of CRT can be used to draw attention to possible lingering sites of racism in adult education.

As a field, I believe the adult education research preconferences for African Americans and other marginalized groups can be framed as an example of "counter-space" (Solórzano et al., 2000) that attempts to combat normative racism. Solórzano et al. (2000) found counter-space was a regenerating space that Black students created in White universities to escape discrimination. CRT suggests scholars might ask, What is revealed if we frame the creation of the African American preconference as counter-space? Was interest convergence used as a strategy? What outcomes are tied to the preconference? Adult educators using CRT might explore the existence and nature of counter-space within the workplace. Do employees of color create counter-space? Are monoracial leadership programs an example of counter-space? Does this "space" affect the learning dynamics in these programs? And what conditions or policies have contributed to the establishment of such programs? These suggest possible research areas that might benefit from a CRT lens.

Finally, using a CRT framework as a template for reviewing professional literature, as McDowell and Jeris (2004) did, may be a penetrating way to test the racial climate of adult education, adult basic education, or HRD. Overall, a CRT analysis can provide a richly textured examination of racism and how deeply it has permeated social structures in education when its analysis retains an undergirding of policy or legal rulings.

Our society is structured with systemic racism. When we accept racism as endemic, we accept that everyone is infected with a disease to greater or lesser degrees. Whites suffer from White privilege; Blacks suffer from internalized racism. To claim to be color-blind allows the disease to spread unchecked. However, as scholars considering the application of CRT, we must think deeply about the potential "otherizing" outcome of CRT. In other words, to what extent can CRT be heard by White educators, administrators, and policy makers who predominate in the roles CRT wishes to influence when the CRT literature consistently locates *intentional* racism at their door (Brown, 1995)? It is the difference between Solórzano et al. (2005) claiming community colleges *deliberately* stanch the pipeline of Latino students versus Castagno and Lee (2007) pointing to a systemic legacy of racism at their college. To the extent that those attracted to CRT can increase the number of empirical studies, they may more effectively demonstrate the value of CRT and overcome the adversarialism that can be communicated when findings are tied to weakly grounded intentions. However, Bergerson (2003), a White scholar, responds somewhat differently. She believes her role and that of other White scholars is to apply CRT by questioning the race-neutral policies and color-blind beliefs of friends as well as colleagues. In other words, she advocates using Whiteness and its privilege to heighten awareness of how racist actions, words, and policies damage the lives of coworkers and students of color.

“... (Carter) is always a man of fact and figure” (Dunbar, cited in Trank, 1999).

[REDACTED]

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## Bio

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