

# “That Sounds Scary, Let’s Ban It:” Analyzing Manufactured Ignorance & the Attack on Critical Race Theory in K-12 Schools

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## *Abstract*

*As of February 2023, 44 states have either introduced or passed legislation that aims to control the teaching of race in K-12 public schools. Using political discourse analysis, we investigate the discourse from six “anti-CRT” documents. We frame the discourse from an agnotological perspective; agnotology is the study of how ignorance is manufactured. Given that political discourse is one-directional, politicians have the unique position of actively constructing ignorance if they are providing information for the purpose of being consumed rather than argued or deliberated. We illustrate how the misuse of words/concepts as well as the distribution of disinformation contributes to manufactured ignorance. Finally, we argue that the deliberate and willful silence about systemic oppression will maintain white supremacy. Our intention is to challenge manufactured ignorance especially as it relates to how race and racism are discussed and taught in K-12 education.*

**Keywords:** *agnotology, ignorance, critical race theory, political discourse analysis*

This paper examines recent attacks on critical race theory (CRT) to understand how political discourse around the inherent dangers of CRT manufactures ignorance in an attempt to maintain hegemony and white supremacy.<sup>1</sup> CRT posits that racism is endemic to American life and embedded in institutions like laws and schools (Delgado, 1988). CRT investigates/exposes systemic racism instead of focusing on individual racist acts and has become the new buzz word for conservative politicians to focus their attacks. With so much misinformation circulating, we sought to identify the discourse used in recent legislation. Since both authors teach in the state of Georgia, after reviewing political discourse on the federal level, we focus on Georgia with the recognition that similar attacks are happening across the nation.

Knowledge about CRT and white supremacy is being silenced in an effort to discredit decades of scholarship, civil rights progress, and the documented experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). If legislation can silence discussions of race/racism, then this country can continue to lie about its true origins in an effort to ignore potential economic and land reparations. James Baldwin (1998) noted white people, especially, “cling” to lies about whiteness in history because they are invested in controlling the narrative. Using political discourse analysis,

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1. We recognize that the “attack on critical race theory” is not necessarily an attack on critical race theory. It is instead, an attack on anti-racism, equality, and equity in an attempt to keep whiteness centered and keep white supremacy alive. However, for the general flow of the paper, and because the media uses the term CRT, we will use this to denote the fact that this attack is an attempt at protecting white supremacy.

we seek to uncover how this discourse manufactures ignorance through misuse of terminology, censorship, and the pursuit of a colorblind ideology.

### **Context of the Attack on CRT**

On May 20, 2021, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, tweeted: “Today, I wrote a letter to the State Board of Education opposing critical race theory (CRT) in our schools. This divisive, anti-American agenda has no place in Georgia classrooms” (Kemp, 2021). Calling CRT concepts divisive functions as a lie about this country’s founding (Baldwin, 1955). Kemp purposefully names CRT as anti-American, but this juxtaposition necessitates that people accept the origin story of the U.S. as one that is free from influence of white supremacy. As we saw from the backlash of Hannah Jones’ (2021) 1619 project, the origin story taught in U.S. schools is already divisive. As Hawkman and Diem (2022) argue:

The origin story of the United States, and therefore of “Americans,” is crafted to shield the influence of white supremacy, establishing a national foundation that is based on lies... Because of the pervasive nature of these lies within the schools and society, generations of people are conditioned to simultaneously accept them as truth and see any opposition to these lies as radical or extreme. (p. 3)

However, Representative Brad Thomas has gone on record stating that CRT is anti-American and it, along with the 1619 project are “being forced on our children by rogue teachers and radical school boards” (AllOnGeorgia, 2022).

Kemp is not alone in this attempt to ban CRT (or other anti-racism concepts); according to edWeek’s *Map: Where Critical Race Theory is Under Attack*, as of February, 2023 forty-four states have introduced legislation to limit the theory’s use in education.<sup>2</sup> The models for these “anti-CRT” bills continue to churn out of conservative think tanks like the Manhattan Institute, America First Policy Institute, and the Heritage Foundation (Schwartz, 2021).

The anti-CRT bills promote a colorblind ideology which suggests that race no longer matters and has no effect on one’s life outcomes (Bonilla Silva, 2003/2010). These bills also don’t recognize that schools currently teach a colorblind version of the founding of our country, and often neglected in the origin story of the United States is colonialism, the genocide of indigenous peoples, as well as an honest examination of slavery. “By disavowing colonialism, U.S. narratives of liberalism re-anchored the objectivity of liberal juridical and cultural regimes in that distanced space through a focused amnesia” (Sheth, 2022, p.5). Controlling the narrative in our schools allows the general public to collectively “forget” the painful truth of our past. This amnesia combined with a colorblind ideology “has become a formidable political tool for the maintenance of the racial order” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003/2010, p. 3). The attack on CRT is just one of the latest attempts to use colorblind ideology as rationale for maintaining the white status quo. However, we know race is endemic to society from centuries of documented racial exclusion, oppression, and discrimination. As noted by historian Ibram X. Kendi (2017), slaveholders considered “African people to be stamped from the beginning as a racially distinct people, as lower than themselves, and as lower in the scale of being than the more populous White indentured servants” (p. 38). That stamp marking Black people as the bottom rung on the hierarchy of race is deeply rooted in U.S. life and embedded in the policies that govern society; this is what CRT aims to understand.

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2. edWeek’s *Map: Where Critical Race Theory is Under Attack* was last updated February 16, 2023.

As mentioned in our earlier footnote, the recent conservative discourse around race, and most especially CRT, indicates the attack is not on CRT itself, but an attack on historically accurate discussions of race and the role of white privilege in America. The attack on CRT strategically manufactures ignorance through legislation that further cements white hegemonic control. Carol Anderson (2016) calls this type of political work *white rage*, which is “not about visible violence, but rather works its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies [in order to] achieve its ends far more effectively, far more destructively” (p. 3). The ongoing maintenance of this colorblind propaganda is a strategic ploy to manipulate what people understand about systemic racism. Proctor and Schiebinger (2008) define *ignorance as a strategic ploy* as ignorance that has been actively produced and manipulated. The conservative agenda is actively manufacturing ignorance through both the misuse of CRT and the promotion of a colorblind ideology.

### **What is Critical Race Theory?**

CRT is a theoretical tool to analyze policy and solve problems. It was originally used as a way of understanding how the U.S. legal system maintains inequalities and oppression (Crenshaw, 2002). It highlights the ways in which race structures our lives and exerts material consequences (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As a theoretical framework, CRT has certain tenets that enable us to apply the theory in analysis. Inherent in a critical race understanding of the world is recognition that white supremacy exists. In fact, white supremacy has been accepted as an innate component in the hierarchical social system within the U.S. (Calmore, 1997). Instead of seeing white supremacy as acts of violence perpetrated by individuals or, collectively, by groups such as the Klu Klux Klan, CRT recognizes white supremacy as “the operation of forces that saturate the everyday mundane actions and policies which shape the world in the interests of white people” (Gillborn, 2010, p. 84). While CRT itself is not taught in K-12 schools, evidence of white supremacy is evident when CRT is utilized to analyze education policies.<sup>3</sup>

The political actors leading the CRT attack are weaponizing the theory by claiming it creates divisiveness in society because it makes white people feel bad about themselves. Cheryl Matias, who has studied white emotionalities at length, has explained:

It is precisely those very emotionalities that shut down the potential for racial understanding. I understand that it may seem tough to understand one was born into a system wrought with racial power and privilege, but the discomfort in learning just how that power and privilege impacts people of color does not parallel how people of color must survive under it. (2020, p. 5-6)

Matias (2016) argues further that white emotionalities are ridden with issues of power, control, and hegemony and can be weaponized in ways that hurt people of color. Using CRT as a weapon allows whiteness to remain centered (Leonardo, 2004) and neglects one of the basic tenets of the theory- that racism does more damage at the institutional level than the personal level.

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3. For examples of how CRT is used in education research see: Ladson-Billings (1998), Annamma & Morrison (2018); Harrison (2016); and Sandals (2020). In these examples, CRT investigates and exposes systemic racism in education policies instead of a focus on individual racist acts.

## Political Discourse Analysis

We used Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) to analyze the language used in political statements and legislative action to illustrate how the discourse among conservative political actors is manufacturing ignorance. PDA examines nuanced context of political language. For example, in many instances, political discourse is one-directional, meaning information is presented by the political actor and received by the public (van Dijk, 1997). This could lead to manufactured ignorance if politicians provide information for the purpose of being consumed rather than argued or deliberated. Subject matter experts are unable to engage directly and immediately with the discourse, leaving the general public vulnerable to disinformation. PDA aims to investigate the representation, functions, and implications of political arguments (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). We analyzed six documents in chronological order to show how the discourse evolved over time.<sup>4</sup>

### Situating PDA and CRT Within Agnotology

We frame our analysis of the political discourse from an agnotological perspective. Agnotology is the study of how ignorance is manufactured (Proctor & Schiebinger, 2008). Studies in the field of ignorance are limited, but it is a field that is gradually growing, and there are a number of scholars who have recently contributed to the emerging canon dedicated to ignorance studies (Tuana, 2008, Croissant, 2014; Gross, 2007; and Mills, 1997 and 2007). Charles Mills (1997, 2007) characterizes ignorance as an inverted epistemology and identifies ignorance in terms of both false beliefs and absence of true belief. He examines the theory of white ignorance and determines that the delusion white people have about white supremacy maintains structures of hegemony. Any action that disrupts the equilibrium of white ignorance will likely meet resistance and challenge. Sheth (2022) explains that these “are challenges to the long-standing received and unchallenged authority of American imperialism and settler-colonialism” (p.3). Under these new anti-CRT laws, educators will be forced into a position where they must choose to censor their lessons and restrict conversations about race and white privilege, or face potential repercussions.

Proctor identified three categories of manufactured ignorance: ignorance as a native state, ignorance as a lost realm, and ignorance as a strategic ploy. For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on ignorance as a strategic ploy (ignorance that is created through deliberate actions). We were interested in understanding how the attack on CRT went from a whistleblower report about a federal diversity training to full blown hysteria that our children were being indoctrinated with evil ideas in public schools. To understand this, we identified how the hysteria led to misuse of terminology which then manufactured ignorance. The implication is that schools and teachers will be forced into censorship and the curriculum will further indoctrinate a colorblind ideology.

Croissant (2014) recognizes that there is value in framing the characteristics, or attributes, one might find within ignorance studies. Her typology of ignorance studies includes the following categories: chronicity, scale, intention, and granularity. Chronicity refers to the problem of manufactured ignorance as chronic and what happened over time to activate the ploy. Understanding the scale helps identify the origin, 174 reach, and consequences of ignorance. The chronicity and

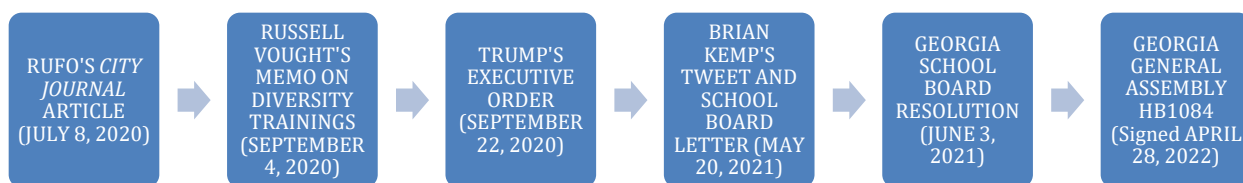
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4. The following documents were used for this analysis: a report by Christopher Rufo; the White House memorandum on Training in the Federal Government, by Russell Vought; the Trump Executive Order 13950: Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping; the letter and Tweet sent by Governor Brian Kemp to the Georgia State Board of Education; the June 3, 2021 Georgia State Board of Education Resolution; and finally, the divisive concepts bill signed by Governor Kemp, HB1084.

scale in our study recognizes that ignorance was produced over time, through a series of local, state, and federal political statements and legislative action that directly impacts K-12 teachers. Granularity tells us whether the knowledge that is being censored is either concrete (high granularity) or theoretical (low granularity) (Croissant, 2014). Because CRT is theoretical knowledge, the conservative agenda intentionally exploits the granularity of information by manipulating the discourse to silence the conversation about race to protect fragile white egos.

### Analyzing the Documents

Given that many states are now engaging in culture wars with an attack on CRT and systemic racism, after we look at the background and federal discourse, we will focus on state level actions taken Georgia. The timeline of documents we analyze is as follows:



The introduction of anti-CRT legislation reached a fevered pitch during the 2022 legislative session, and much of the language in these policies can be directly linked to the executive order implemented by the Trump administration in September of 2020. However, the words “critical race theory” are nowhere to be found in this executive order even though the legislation is often dubbed in the media as anti-CRT legislation. To find the origin of why CRT became entangled with the legislative orders, we begin with conservative journalist Christopher Rufo who eventually appeared on Tucker Carlson’s show to sound the alarm about critical race theory.<sup>5</sup>

### The Rufo Effect: From the Whistleblower to the Whitehouse

Citing what Rufo calls a set of whistleblower documents that he obtained from an anonymous source, he claims that CRT has spread rapidly through the federal government (Rufo, July 18, 2020). The documents were allegedly distributed during a federal diversity training conducted by Cook Ross Inc, a leading Diversity and Inclusion consultancy. Here is one example of Rufo’s interpretation of the training provided from the whistleblower documents along with the original language:

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5. Christopher Rufo is currently a Senior Fellow at the conservative think tank, Manhattan Institute. In 2018, he ran an unsuccessful campaign for city council in Seattle. Rufo appeared on Fox News’ *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, a show former President Donald Trump appeared for interviews and reportedly watched regularly, on September 2, 2020.

Rufo's Interpretation:

The training begins with the premise that “virtually all White people contribute to racism” and have internalized “fairly consistent narratives about race” that “don’t support the dismantling of racist institutions.” Therefore, the trainers argue, white federal employees must “struggle to own their racism” and “invest in race-based growth.” “White managers” are asked to create “safe spaces” where black employees can explain “what it means to be Black” and be “seen in their pain.” White employees are instructed to “provide unconditional solidarity,” remain silent, and “sit in the discomfort” of their own racism. If any conflicts arise, the trainers insist that whites “don’t get to decide when someone is being too emotional, too rash, [or] too mean” and cannot protest if a person of color “responds to their oppression in a way [they] don’t like.”

It is imperative at this time that people who are White invest in race-based growth and development on topics such as systemic racism, civil rights history, unconscious bias, inclusion, and contemporary ideology such as anti-racism, intersectionality, White privilege, and White fragility. (Udarta Consulting, p. 22)

Don't shy away from language like "whiteness," "racism," "white supremacy" and "allyship." There was a time when education, talks, and references to these topics might have been seen as inflammatory, or generating negative responses, especially from White people. Our times now are requiring us to sit in the discomfort that these notions could cause, and to be willing to address our own growth and responsibility. (Udarta Consulting, p. 19)

Provide unconditional solidarity. That does not mean "I'd be on your side if you didn't act so angry" (e.g.). You don't get to decide when someone is being to emotional, too rash, to mean, or otherwise "undeserving of your support." Your allyship is not a favor that you can retract when some responds to their oppression in a way you don't like. You just have to be there. (Udarta Consulting, p. 29)

Rufo’s interpretation cherry picks phrases from the training documents and distorts the message by rearranging the language.<sup>6</sup> For example, in the diversity training documents obtained by Rufo, under a section labeled *How to be an Ally*, it notes that to be an ally, a white person needs to provide “unconditional solidarity” which means “you don’t get to decide when someone is being too emotional, too rash, [too] mean, or otherwise undeserving of your support” (Udarta Consulting, LLC document as cited in Rufo, July 15, 2020). Rufo selected the words “unconditional solidarity” and filled in his own blank with the idea that white people were instructed to “remain silent.” Rather, the diversity training materials point out that white people may feel the need to fill silence with their own commentary, and, instead, suggest white people should listen more and refrain from centering themselves in conversations about Black experiences. Whether one agrees with the advice in the pamphlet is not the point here, the point is that Rufo manipulated the context and the language to conform to his agenda of targeting social justice advocates.

At the end of Rufo’s article, he calls on Trump to issue an executive order “banning federal agencies from teaching the toxic principles of critical race theory, race essentialism, and neo-segregationism” and warns “the public should brace for a long war against the diversity-industrial complex and its enablers” (Rufo, 2020, para. 9). Shortly after Rufo’s call to action, Russell Vought, former director of the Office of Management and Budget under former President Donald Trump, issued an official memo on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020 claiming that diversity trainings cost millions of taxpayer dollars and are “divisive, anti-American propaganda.”

The memo notes that press reports (i.e. Rufo’s article) indicate that government employees attended trainings where they learned that white people benefit from racism. He repeats that these diversity trainings are “un-American propaganda” and they are “divisive.” Vought’s memo (2020) directs “all agencies [to] begin to identify all contracts or other agency spending related to any

6. We would like to note that it is entirely possible there were more documents distributed or presented during the training, but only one such document is linked in Rufo’s July 15, 2020 article. The documents are embedded in Rufo’s article, Udarta Consulting, LLC is identified as the creator of the documents.

training on “critical race theory,” “white privilege,” or any other training or propaganda effort that teaches or suggest 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” (para. 4).

Two months following the alleged whistleblower documents from Rufo and only a few weeks after the memo was released by Vought, former President Donald Trump signed an executive order titled *Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping*. The purpose of the executive order was to “promote unity in the Federal workforce, and to combat offensive and anti-American race and sex stereotyping and scapegoating” (Executive Order No. 13950, 2020) It is important to note that the phrase critical race theory is not used directly in the executive order, rather it just refers to an unidentified “destructive” and “malign ideology.” The executive order is not directed towards education policy, rather it is for any federal contractors, Uniformed Services, federal grant recipients, and executive departments and agencies, which could include public schools.<sup>7</sup>

The terminology in the memo and the executive order manufactures ignorance about the reality of racism in the U.S. by sowing doubt and stirring up fear. By calling discussions about race anti-American, propaganda, divisive, destructive and malign, someone who is otherwise uninformed could become afraid that some kind of evil indoctrination was happening at the federal level.

### **Georgia Governor Brian Kemp Tweets a Letter**

The executive order signed by Trump did not last long. On January 20, 2021, newly inaugurated President Joe Biden revoked the order leaving it up to individual states to pass similar legislation. In May 2021, Governor Brian Kemp published a letter on Twitter, that urged the Georgia State Board of Education to “take immediate steps to ensure that Critical Race Theory and its dangerous ideology do not take root in our state standards or curriculum.” In the letter, Kemp calls CRT “divisive,” “anti-American,” and “dangerous ideology.”<sup>8</sup> Kemp’s letter incited fear in the public’s imagination about what was being taught in Georgia’s K-12 public schools. Kemp’s discourse was strategically used to deceive the public about the curriculum. CRT is a theoretical tool known to CRT scholars in higher education and is not a standard in the K-12 public school curriculum in Georgia. Using this terminology is a deceptive ploy designed to shift the focus from talking about issues of racism and oppression and incite fear that children are being indoctrinated with anti-American ideologies.

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7. In November of 2020, Trump signed another Executive Order to establish the 1776 Commission to combat the perceived attacks on founding principles and core American values related to race. They were formed as an advisory commission under the Department of Education. Their report was to inform curriculum policy regarding history and civics education to “enable a rising generation to understand the history and principles of the founding of the United States in 1776 and to strive to form a more perfect Union.” The 1776 Commission report was released on January 18, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, 2021. Two days later, Joe Biden dissolved the commission and their report was archived. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/11/05/2020-24793/establishing-the-presidents-advisory-1776-commission>

8. For those living outside of the state of Georgia, know that this is the same person who, in a campaign commercial during his run for governor in 2020, held a shotgun aimed at a teenage boy who planned to take Kemp’s daughter to prom (CNNPolitics, 2018). This commercial glorified gun violence and misogyny and was certainly more divisive than a theory that can help us solve the nation’s widespread racism problem.

## **Georgia State Board of Education Resolution**

Following Kemp's letter, the Georgia State Board of Education passed a resolution (11-2) limiting discussions about race in K-12 classrooms. The resolution was copied from "The Partisanship out of Civics Act" authored by a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center (Tagami, 2021). The resolution (Jones, 2021) states they believe "the United States of America is not a racist country, and that the state of Georgia is not a racist state (para. 2)." Naming this in a resolution does not make it a fact. The U.S. as a country and the state of Georgia, in particular, are indeed racist. There is systemic racism in terms of disparities in quality education, differences in sentencing for crimes, as well as major health disparities. However, there are also individual acts of racism and racial violence perpetrated on a daily basis. We can look back at history to the Race Riot of 1906 and the lynching of two Black couples in 1946 or, even modern-day violence such as the racially motivated killing of Ahmaud Arbery. One of the author's Black children attends high school in Georgia with a white boy who filmed himself holding a gun and invoking racial terror by referring to killing Black people whom he referred to with the N word. This video surfaced immediately after two other videos of white students from the same school saying the N word. To declare that the state of Georgia is not a racist state is a slap in the face to BIPOC who regularly deal with racial violence. Conservatives can try to declare something as the truth but, again, they are not the only arbiters of the truth and nor should they be.

The resolution continues that schools should not teach that anyone is "inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive" and also that no one should be made to feel bad for past acts perpetrated by people of a similar race or gender (Jones, 2021, para. 3). It states that no one should feel "discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex" (Jones, 2021, para. 3). Again, the intent here is to protect fragile white egos at the expense of BIPOC experiences. White students are able to position themselves as victims while the actual oppressive experiences of BIPOC are dismissed and ignored.

## **Georgia General Assembly Passes Divisive Concepts Bill**

In April 2022, Kemp signed HB1084, otherwise known as the Protect Students First Act, into law. This bill undermines educators' abilities to teach about topics like systemic racism, slavery, and oppression. Educators and schools found in violation will face consequences. HB1084 prohibits teaching that the U.S. is a "systemically racist country" and incorporates some of the language from State Board of Education's resolution about not causing guilt or anguish. It requires that school districts create a complaint resolution process to address violation complaints and allow parents to approve curriculum materials. This bill clearly undermines teachers' professionalism and agency (Ravitch, 2016) but, further, the bill will silence necessary and important conversations about the founding of this country, whose work built and sustained the economy, and the ways in which white supremacy undergirds many of the laws that continue to govern us all.

## **Framing the Discourse Using Agnotology**

Ignorance is being manufactured through the spread of disinformation about CRT which ultimately silences conversations about race, racism, and justice. Across the documents there is consistent use of incorrect and deceptive terminology. In correspondence with Benjamin Wallace-



Wells, contributing author to *The New Yorker*, Rufo recounts his rationale for selecting the term critical race theory:

We've needed new language for these issues. 'Political correctness' is a dated term and, more importantly, doesn't apply anymore. It's much more invasive than mere 'correctness,' which is a mechanism of social control, but not the heart of what's happening. The other frames are wrong, too: 'cancel culture' is a vacuous term and doesn't translate into a political program; 'woke' is a good epithet, but it's too broad, too terminal, too easily brushed aside. 'Critical race theory' is the perfect villain. (Wallace-Wells, 2021, para 6)

Along with employing CRT incorrectly, the political discourse tracing back to Rufo's article has consistently used terminology as disinformation. For something to qualify as disinformation, it must be perceived as inaccurate and as pursuing some kind of political gain (Tsang, 2021, p. 1061). Terms like *anti-American*, *evil*, *divisive*, *dangerous*, *propaganda*, *destructive*, *malign*, *offensive*, *racial scapegoating*, *indoctrination*, are just a sample of the deceptive language used across these documents. For example, Vought's use of the word *evil* in a memo about restricting federal monies to anti-racist training is a strategic ploy to distort the reality of what lessons about systemic racism are actually meant to teach. Concepts like white privilege denote that white people do not experience discrimination or mistreatment based on the color of their skin. This is not an *evil* or *divisive* idea; it is meant to help white people recognize their complicity in systemic racism.

The term that appears most often in anti-CRT political discourse is *divisiveness* as if discussing racism will lead to animosity and therefore divide the country. As educational scholars, we know that avoiding conversations about race leads to further racial tension and disparities (Cooper and Chizhik, 2015). When students deliberate social justice issues in the classroom, they are practicing a democratic function of American citizenship. They are employing their right to free-speech and they are discerning real societal problems with real solutions.

2022 was an election year, and the CRT debate has become a salient issue with increasing media attention. Governor Kemp applauded the efforts of anti-CRT lawmakers, and in his own bid to win the gubernatorial election in 2022, he actively stood by his support of any law that will end CRT in schools. Voters who heed the misleading political discourse as dogmatic principles are led to believe that systemic racism is a dangerous ideology and not a reality. These voters will be ignorant of the experiences of BIPOC and more likely to denounce policies that could help individuals who face oppression.

It is frustrating that CRT and systemic racism are labeled as ideologies yet the origin story anti-CRT politicians tell (that incidentally is full of lies and ideology) is automatically considered fact. Why do white people get to be the arbiters of fact and BIPOC's perspectives dismissed as "divisive" fiction? Despite a long and well documented body of scholarship from critical scholars, many white people want to pretend that systemic inequality does not exist. They know racism exists (i.e. this is not naivete on their part; it is more sinister and calculating) and, yet, they continue the masquerade. The lies we tell children about current U.S. history are full of mistruths and false representations regarding the true horrors that occurred. As students become more critical, they will recognize that the way history is taught continues to propagate misleading information. Instead of being honest about their motives, anti-CRT politicians lead people to fear CRT. As educators, we believe it is more divisive to continue to teach a curriculum that white washes history. It makes it seem as if the Indigenous gave up their land and welcomed in "pilgrims." This is the

colonial settler narrative that comforts white conservatives at night. The current curriculum also portrays slavery as a benevolent institution instead of the horrific institution it was with very little recognition of how the forced labor of so many people of the African diaspora actually made this country economically strong. Censoring and silencing historically accurate narratives will further manufacture ignorance in an effort to maintain hegemony and white supremacy.

## Conclusion

The culture wars are not a new phenomenon and will continue as the federal and state governments, local districts, and neighborhood schools debate over how to teach what are labeled controversial issues (Apple, 2004). But, we must engage in these debates with the full recognition that education is already situated within a sociopolitical context. Teachers make decisions every-day that are influenced by larger societal and political forces (Nieto & Bode, 1998). One cannot pretend that this is not occurring and, therefore, teachers are simply unable to just teach while ignoring the sociopolitical context that exists outside of the classroom. Students bring their own beliefs, ideas, and experiences to the classroom. For many BIPOC students, racism is real experience and they navigate it on a daily basis. Teachers cannot ignore that this is happening nor should they (Howard, 2003).

The current educational landscape we have analyzed in this paper illustrates that politics is constricting what is allowed to occur in the classroom. States and local school boards are over-reaching to try to control curriculum and instruction in the name of misguided patriotism (Apple, 2011). By controlling curriculum and instruction, politicians are attempting to control what teachers, professionals in their own right, can do in the classroom. Apple (2013) notes that, “this regime of control is not based on trust, but on a deep suspicion of the motives and competence of teachers” (p. 43). We are left to wonder how politicians, who exhibit little to no knowledge of educational philosophy and pedagogy, let alone a thorough understanding of educational equity, are the ones driving this control of curriculum.

Sadly, this cultural moment, like the culture wars that predate this one, have been a long time coming. Trump’s political rise was due, in large part, to his embrace of white nationalists and his public endorsement of white supremacy. As scholars, we know that racism can only exist as long as white supremacy thrives. We also know that the Trump presidency showed many politicians that they can lie as long as they believe the lies themselves. These separate actions have coalesced to a moment in time when white supremacists can claim to be victims of divisive ideologies while spreading disinformation:

In this emboldened en/whitening moment, hate speech by White supremacists is wrongly considered free speech, Whiteness incorrectly presents itself as in need of civil protection, and willfully ignorant, ahistorical #alternativefacts reign supreme over historical reality. (Matias & Newlove, 2017, p. 926)

As former K-12 teachers and current higher education academicians, we will fight against this misguided force by calling on teachers and educational leaders to teach accurate history and have meaningful, honest conversations about what life is really like in this country. We cannot sit back ethically, morally, or professionally while our profession is taken over by pseudo-fascists who want to continue to exert their invisible power over the masses. Extolling colorblindness in this country will NOT cure racism. As Crenshaw notes, this attack on CRT and systemic racism is an

attempt that “would allow only for a “history” that holds no contemporary consequences; racism ended in the past, according to the developing backlash, and we would all be better off if we didn’t try to connect it to the present” (Crenshaw, 2021, para. 2). Racism is not a distant part of history; and white supremacy was, and still is, one of the founding principles of our nation. Denying this, or silencing these truths, will censor knowledge and continue to manufacture ignorance.

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