Conjuring the Devil: Historicizing Attacks on Critical Race Theory

Kevin Lawrence Henry, Jr., DeMarcus Jenkins, Mark White, & Carl D. Greer

Abstract

In this paper, we explore white supremacy's "projection" of the "devil" by focusing on its construction and deployment of what Stanley Cohen (1972/2002) terms "folk devils" or those who are seen as deviant. We argue Critical Race Theory (CRT) and conjoining equity centered discourses and practices are situated as a folk devil. Understanding the significance of history to CRT analysis, this paper historicizes current attacks on CRT by looking to the evidentiary record of previous conservative efforts to ban "subversive knowledge" and to categorize it as a folk devil. We suggest these attacks are part of a larger political project of white epistemological capture, which is a tactic used to foreclose emancipatory thought and solidify violent white ways of knowing and being. Drawing on narratives from conservative politicians and thought leaders, this paper utilizes critical race theory's constructs of racial realism and whiteness as property to unpack white supremacy's efforts at preservation. In doing so, we argue that the folk devil is necessary for the cohering of normative innocent white identity, the (re)calibration of the state towards whiteness, and serves as a sacrifice to white anger and disgust. Such insidious moves recenter the patterned violence of whiteness that aims to dehumanize, exclude, repress, and suppress. This paper concludes with implications for practice.

Keywords: *critical race theory, censorship, curriculum policy, whiteness, educational reform*

Schooling, while often portrayed as the great equalizer, can be understood as an institution embedded within and constitutive of white supremacy and white racial dominance. How white supremacy gets operationalized in education is vast and multifaceted and often aims to maintain its salvation by parasitic means (Henry, 2016, 2021, 2022), by exclusion, distortion, abjection, and dispossession of people of color. One can easily witness the shape of white supremacy in both the mundane and extravagant realities of education in various forms including inequitable funding and culturally irrelevant pedagogical and curricular choices. Such forms are demonstrative of points among a constellation of practices—both material and nonmaterial—that solidify schools as sites of suffering that socially, politically, and ideologically fund whiteness and white dominance (Dumas, 2014; Jenkins, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2018; Matias, 2016). These racialized realities can be understood as configurations of power relations in education.

One central area of examination and where education and politics have perpetually collided is around school curriculum. Education scholars have long noted curriculum as a politically charged and ideologically situated instrument (Apple, 1993; Gordon, 1997; Kliebard, 1987; Pinar, 2007; Watkins, 1993). As such, struggles over curriculum are infused with the racial regimes of the day. Despite an ethical imperative to create curriculum that reflects the wide array of cultures,

histories, and knowledges of a multicultural populace, curriculum across the United States remains overwhelmingly Eurocentric and proffers notions of American exceptionalism.

The presidency of Donald Trump renewed and intensified public and political interest in K-12 school curriculum. Following a series of incidences such as separating immigrant families and locking children in cages, all in efforts to "make America great again," political conservatives took aim at what they regarded as a curriculum that was anti-American and decidedly indoctrinating children in "critical race theory," a theory, often taught in graduate and professional schools, that seeks to analyze the role of race and racism in American institutions. Beyond the factual reality that what is often taught in K-12 schools typically reifies and reproduces an Americanism that, as Toni Morrison (1992) remarks, "means white," many states are considering legislation to censor critical race theory (CRT) in schools. To date, more than nine states have passed laws censoring any mention of CRT or other efforts to address historical truth about the role of inequity in society. A recent study by Pollock and Rogers (2022), found that at least 800 districts enrolling 35% of K-12 students are impacted by these restrictive efforts.

Much of the legislation is based on the profound lie that critical race theory hates white people and aims to harm children psychologically. In reference to his state's CRT ban, Republican Governor Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma said, "we can and should teach…history without labeling a young child as an 'oppressor' or requiring he or she feel guilt or shame based on their race or sex." The flagrant miscategorization of CRT and efforts to silence knowledge about past and current realities of racial power remind us of the ever constant need to remain vigilant to how white supremacy marshals its power.

This vigilance, as critical race theorist David Stovall (2013) wrote, "can sometimes make you feel like you're up against evil incarnate—the devil" (p. 289). In his discussion of Critical Race Praxis, Stovall (2013) uses the imagery of "fightin' the devil 24/7," to illustrate the perpetual hauntings of white supremacy and the efforts needed to exorcise it. This paper is interested in the same "devil" Stovall names—white supremacy—but focuses on its seductive, morphic masquerade. In this paper, we explore white supremacy's "projection" of the "devil" by focusing on its construction and deployment of what sociologist Stanley Cohen (1972) terms "folk devils" or that which is perceived as deviant. Historically, the folk devil is used as both scapegoat and a sign for social problems during periods of uncertainty and panic. We submit in the post-Trump presidency, CRT and conjoining equity-centered discourses and practices are situated as a folk devil.

Moreover, this paper illuminates the attacks on CRT are a constitutive part of what we term *white epistemological capture*, a tactic used to foreclose emancipatory thought and solidify violent white ways of knowing and being. White epistemological capture attempts to capture and arrest people into a distorted way of seeing and knowing the world. Importantly, white epistemological capture is not merely an individual quirk or oddity, but rather is buttressed by structural racism and serves to solidify and expand white supremacist ideology and normalize inequitable material conditions. This paper historicizes current attacks on CRT by looking at the evidentiary record of previous historical efforts to ban "subversive knowledge" and to categorize it as a folk devil. This paper utilizes critical race theory to trace and unpack white supremacy's efforts at preservation. In doing so, we suggest that the folk devil is necessary for the cohering of a normative, innocent white identity, the (re)calibration of the state towards whiteness, and serves as a sacrifice to white anger and disgust. Such insidious moves recenter the patterned violence of whiteness that aims to dehumanize, exclude, repress, and suppress. This paper ends with implications for educational justice.

Critical Race Theory as a Folk Devil

In 1972 sociologist Stanley Cohen published a canonical study on the socially constructed nature of deviance. Cohen was interested in the relationship between media representation and youth subcultures in the 1960s. Cohen's desire to better understand two youth groups, "The Mods" and "Rockers," led him to write about the role of moral panics in society and the elements that underpin them, namely the "folk devil." Cohen articulated how the media was central in casting minor vandalism by a few social group members and overlaying those actions to the broader group. Such frequent negative representation triggered public concern, intensified policing, and subsequently increased juvenile arrests. Central to Cohen's analysis is the notion of moral panic. Cohen (1972) remarks,

> Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges, and or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (p. 9)

Notably, Cohen articulates the elements of a moral panic, arguing that moral panics are defined by what is seen as at odds with or a threat to societal values and interests. Central to his understanding of moral panics are two other notions. The first is that fear or concern about what is categorized as nefarious is a hallmark of moral panic (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). One can think of concerns, for instance, about what might be seen as sexually deviant or sexually immoral behaviors. A host of longstanding, nonevidence based policies around abstinence, as well as increasingly new policies limiting the educational lives of LGBTQIA youth, could be included here. Secondly, central to moral panics are distortions. Cohen (1972) posits that sensationalism, melodrama, and deliberate miscategorizations are key features of a moral panic, often blowing out of proportion the reality of the "threat." The folk devil conjoins and stands as a base for moral panics.

For Cohen, folk devils are labeled as threats to society's social order and presumed interests. In similar earlier works, scholars have located the folk devil as that which stands outside the norm. In their study on policing, Stuart Hall and colleagues (1978) gave a provocative definition of the folk devil. As they explain it,

> In one sense, the Folk Devil comes up at us unexpectedly, out of the darkness, out of nowhere. In another sense, he is all too familiar; we know him already before he appears. He is the reverse image, the alternative to all we know: *the negation.* He is the fear of failure that is secreted at the heart of success, the danger that lurks inside security, the profligate figure by whom Virtue is constantly tempted…When things threaten to disintegrate, the Folk Devil not only becomes the bearer of all our social anxieties, but we turn against him with the full wrath of our indignation. (p. 161)

Hall et al.'s (1978) framing of the folk devil is particularly useful in our current discussion of recent anti-CRT/anti-truth/anti-equity bans. For Hall et al. (1978), the folk devil already holds a

location of "other" in the social discourse; it is that which stands against "virtue" and goodness. As the "other," the folk devil is positioned as a menace to society and the negation of normativity.

Of course, one would be remiss not to situate the conversation of the folk devil within the socio-political realities of a society structured in white dominance. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2012) reminds us of the racial grammar that organizes everyday life. Bonilla-Silva (2012) argues that the racial grammar "structures cognition, vision, and even feelings on all sort of racial matters. This grammar normalizes the standards of white supremacy" (p. 173). As such, it is possible that in many instances, the folk devil is constructed within the interpretive gaze and for the political purposes of white supremacy. It stands to reason then that CRT, a theory aimed at unpacking and disrupting the multifaceted violence of white supremacist orthodoxy, could be labeled a "heretical" folk devil (Henry, 2019).

We argue, in part, that CRT and adjoining equity-centered discourses are situated as the folk devil in current conservative movements that aim to maintain white supremacist ideology in education. By conjuring CRT as the folk devil and instigating a moral panic around curriculum that deals honestly with historical truth and is reflective of the many cultures within the United States, conservative leaders are attempting to address white racial anxieties around an increasingly diverse U.S. and slippages in electoral power, and solidify ideological hegemony with respect to curriculum (Matias, 2016b; Yancy, 2008). Critically, as Hall et al. (1978) note, the folk devil seems to come out of nowhere, but "in another sense, he is all too familiar." The folk devil of critical race theory is yet related to the long line of previous folk devils used to stoke and pacify white racial anxiety. In the next section, we provide a glancing account of previous efforts on behalf of white supremacy to maintain itself by excluding historical perspectives and accounts that accurately depict its violence.

Historicizing Current Attacks on Critical Race Theory

Current legislation against CRT and other equity-based models, seeks to eliminate or replace historical truths for the seductive indoctrinations of white supremacy that preserves white ignorance, innocence, and insolence. While current conservative mobilizations may seem shocking or even tied to the Trump administration, to locate them solely within the present would be to miss the longstanding history of white epistemological capture, a tactic used to foreclose emancipatory thought and corral others to believe in the distortions of whiteness. In this section, we move from a presentism that sees these formations as representative of the here and now and locate the current curricular attacks within the wider skirt of white supremacy. Specifically, we focus on two cases—multiculturalism and ethnic studies—to illuminate this patterned practice of (re)creating folk devils as a tactic to advance white epistemological capture.

The Folk Devil of Multiculturalism

The movement for multicultural curriculum is connected to advances made during the civil rights movement and historically oppressed groups' struggles for greater (and accurate) representation in learning contexts. Although occupied with educational equity for students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, multicultural education aims to create an atmosphere in which "a wide range of cultural groups, such as women, handicapped persons, ethnic groups, and various regional groups, will experience educational equity" (Banks, 1981, p. 13). Educational institutions

including K-12 schools, colleges, and universities responded to the concerns and activism of marginalized groups who were dissatisfied with inequities in the educational system. Such institutional responses "defined the earliest conceptualization of multicultural education" (Gorski, 1999). In response, conservative discourses attempted to target multiculturalism as a folk devil by claiming that it is a direct antagonism to more traditional (and implicitly Christian) American values. Attacks on multiculturalism occurred at multiple governmental scales and to various degrees of vitriol, from tempered opposition seemingly based on logistical concerns regarding implementation to outright virulent hostility and explicitly racist attacks. We draw on local news outlets and broader national media instances where the discourses that structured the anti-multiculturalism sentiment played out and contributed to white epistemological capture.

Early attacks on multicultural education tracked along three themes: (1) concerns regarding the efficiency and usefulness of laws requiring multicultural education; (2) a framework of liberalism that stressed that multiculturalism attempted to focus on groups when "true" American values should focus on the individual; and (3) violent rhetoric that painted multiculturalism as a subversive plot with the sole purpose of undermining mainstream Western values and attempting to condemn and overthrow America. Taken together, these attacks are demonstrative of white supremacist distortion tactics used to produce a racial folk devil. Beyond constructing multiculturalism as a folk devil, white leaders peddled the larger project of white epistemological capture. Recall white epistemological capture is a historically rooted maneuver that forecloses emancipatory and counter-hegemonic thought. In moving beyond traditional Eurocentric norms, multiculturalism stood as a perceived affront to those norms and needed to be reined in. The three themes of resistance to multiculturalism aim to debase its importance and allow whiteness to remain hegemonic in education.

Many representatives who opposed multiculturalism argued that the bills under legislative consideration were redundant because teachers were already using inclusive approaches. For example, Nebraska state Senator Kate Witek claimed that numerous teachers told her they "were teaching multicultural education before the law went into effect. The law only requires these teachers to document what they are doing" (Multicultural Education, 1995). Similarly, Minnesota state Senator Jane Krentz criticized the usefulness of the bill, arguing "We don't need more paperwork…The focus shouldn't be on bean counting, but on putting that time and energy into making a difference in kids' lives" (Diversity Rule, 1997). Representatives claimed that the pedagogy and curriculum approaches that multicultural mandates demanded amounted to useless government interference and would serve only to take time and resources away from classrooms and children. Similar to current anti-CRT rhetoric, such claims focus on a "there" that is nonexistent. Like today's opposition who claim CRT is ubiquitous in schools, Witek suggested that a widespread teaching of multiculturalism abounded.

Moreover, arguments that eschewed structural and communitarian logics, in favor of individualism proliferated. The decades following World War II marked a move away from President Roosevelt's New Deal social welfare policies. Simultaneously, there was an expansion in ideas of rugged individualism and calls for limited government interference that anchored demands for cultural assimilation into the (white, Christian) "American" way of life. Tennessee Senator, Lamar Alexander, who also served as the Secretary of Education in the early 1990s responded to questions asking whether individualism could be an appropriate solution to the growing effects of multiculturalism by saying, "Yes. We are a nation of individuals, not a nation of groups. There's no other way to make sense of America unless we honor and recognize that" (Alexander, 1999). For Alex-

ander, it is the prominence of the individual and liberties that make it possible to understand American culture. Alexander and other political conservatives positioned multiculturalism as purporting rights based on group organization, which made multiculturalism antithetical to American ideals.

In the early 1990s, conservative rhetoric furthered the idea that true American values were based on individualism and claimed that the main goal of multiculturalism was to promote autonomy based on ethnic and racial group identification. Conservative pundits claimed that multiculturalism endangered America. Historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., author of *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1992), claimed that "the bonds of national cohesion in the republic are sufficiently fragmented already," and the purpose of public education should be to strengthen these bonds, not weaken them, by promoting what he considered group objectivity and the heightening of "ethnic tensions" (Walters, 1991). Conservative rhetoric worked to normalize liberalism's tenet of individuality and policy efforts that attempted to reform or pushback against this agenda were portrayed as in conflict with American ideals. Multiculturalism was simultaneously casted as a folk devil and un-American.

In the months leading up to the 1992 presidential election, John Leo, writer and columnist for *U.S. News & World Report*, criticized what he perceived as "racial gerrymandering." He described it as a process that "makes too much of tribal identity" and exists in opposition to "normal politics" that attempts to eclipse race and build coalition while "the multicultural approach keeps the racial barriers high and assumes that racial groups, not individuals, must be empowered" (Leo, 1992). This type of rhetoric, used by national-level politicians and media personalities, is an example of white epistemological capture that reached wide audiences by appealing to notions of liberalism and by leveraging criticisms against multiculturalism.

Calls to cement individualism are also calls of white epistemological capture since they diminish communitarian ways of knowing and being, which is often an epistemology employed by communities of color (Henry, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Arresting the development of counter-hegemonic knowledge is central to the project of white epistemological capture. Additionally, by bracketing what is considered normative and constructing multiculturalism as a deviant folk devil, conservatives were engaging in white epistemological capture.

Similar to other attempts at casting multiculturalism as folk devil, conservative discourse made scornful attacks on multiculturalism by positing multiculturalism as overtly anti-American. Some even suggested that it was a movement which functioned to, as Oklahoma state senator Bill Greaves argued, "undermine the Christian culture on which [America] is based" (House Rejects Report, 1994). On several occasions, legislation was introduced to counter the alleged anti-America multicultural agenda. Senate Resolution 66, introduced by Washington Senator, Slade Gorton attempted to prevent the adoption of certain national history standards. The legislation stated that if any "federal agency provides funds for the development of the standards…the recipient of such funds should have a decent respect for the contributions of western civilization, and United States history, ideas, and institutions, to the increase of freedom and prosperity around the world." This anti-multicultural rhetoric intricately tied together comments surrounding immigration at the end of the 20th century with the upsurge of xenophobia following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. For example, in 2003, Colorado Representative Tom Tancredo claimed that "massive immigration" and "bizarre and rabid multiculturalism" posed a serious threat to America and western civilization more broadly (108 Cong. Rec. 4507, 2003). Attempts to connect anti-multicultural rhetoric to terrorist attacks exacerbated racialized hysteria and extended moral panic across the United States.

Discourses positing multiculturalism as anti-American and anti-Western encouraged unconcealed hostility in other outlets. The 1994 Republican Party's nominee for Florida's 5th Congressional District, Don Garlits, reacted to a question on race relations by directly attacking multiculturalism. Garlits said, "This multicultural thing is wrong. We should teach America is great. That's what I see that people want. Even black people that I talk to at the races are not interested in multiculturalism." When asked about schools and multicultural curriculum specifically, Garlits responded, "We need to teach that America is great. The people that don't like it, we should have the FBI investigate them. Bring them before grand juries and charge them with doing subversive, traitorous activities" (FL 05, 1994). Although these more outlandish proclamations tended to be denounced by the broader conservative party, the sentiment expressed was popular and widespread, especially at the local level.

While pushback to multiculturalism took many forms, aspects of the resistance mirror current opposition to CRT. There were attempts to cast group identity as antithetical to the American dream, calls for multiculturalism to be denounced because of purported anti-American and anti-west sentiments, and declarations to teach "America is great." Throughout these discourses, whiteness was normalized as structurally central to American culture. Attacks on multiculturalism were violent and only occasionally veiled contempt for nonwhite group cohesion and identity.

The Folk Devil of Ethnic Studies

The above case of the attacks on multiculturalism illustrates how white supremacy manifests in K-12 curriculum and how educational politics are implicated in that process. Conservative political thought positions itself as a driving force actively working against exploring topics of racial equity in the classroom in conjunction with advancing white supremacist ideologies. The limited engagement that students and educators have with issues of race and racism through traditional K-12 curriculum works to sustain whiteness and advance the project of white epistemological capture. Such limited engagement solidifies the significance of what scholars coin the ethnic studies movement. Like multiculturalism, conservative discourses were leveraged against ethnic studies in efforts to cast it as a folk devil that stands counter to American values. Ethnic studies invokes the histories, traditions, literature, and philosophies of racially minoritized groups in America (Banks, 2012; Monterio, 2010). The ethnic studies movement rejects the historical precedent of a white-centric telling of the social sciences, humanities, and arts through the curriculum and calls for the inclusion of historically minoritized voices in the classroom. Using the term movement also acknowledges the activist roots and perpetual struggle associated with racially minoritized communities claiming space through ethnic studies within the K-12 classroom (Owens, 2018).

The circumstances surrounding the Arizona's ethnic studies movement aptly illuminates how a counter-hegemonic educational approach (ethnic studies) gets cast as a folk devil and illustrates white epistemological capture. The Arizona case crystallizes the relationship between white supremacy, education policy, and curriculum in many ways. Arizona's political climate around anti-immigration rhetoric, reinforcement of state exclusionary practices, and neoliberal reliance on Chicano immigration labor uniquely position the state's stance on race (Banks, 2012; Jensen, 2013). The conservative political infrastructure fostered a governing body that aggressively targeted the budding Arizona ethnic studies movement in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD). Numerous attacks from conservative elected officials at the local and state levels highlighted the precarious nature of race held in the public forum regarding public K-12 education

across the state. The following highlights instances in local, state, and national media where the discourse that structured anti-ethnic studies sentiment transpired. Three overarching themes that emerged from exploring media include the following: (1) anxieties around the negative portrayal of America through calls for abolishing systems; (2) belief that a culturally responsive curriculum fosters racial division amongst youth by individually acknowledging their cultural and ethnic genealogies; and (3) race-neutral rhetoric that recenters whiteness as the dominant narrative in the classroom (Cabrera et al., 2013; Dotts, 2015; Duncan-Andrade, 2014; Romero, 2010).

Arizona's ethnic studies policy backlash was propelled most intensely by Arizona's State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne. Horne constructed House Bill (HB) 2281 in response to the implementation of a Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in the TUSD during the early 2000s. His motivation for this legislation came after activist Dolores Huerta stated that "Republicans hate Latinos" at a talk delivered at Tucson High School (Horne, 2007; Jensen, 2013). Horne responded by sending his Republican deputy Margaret Garcia Dugan (a Latina identifying woman) to Tucson High school, where young people met her by turning their backs, lifting their fists into the air during her speech, and walking out (Fernandez, 2012; Horne, 2007; Jensen, 2013). After this display, Horne penned an open letter calling for the dismantling of Ethnic Studies (and thus the MAS program) as it encouraged "defiance of authority" and created a "hostile atmosphere in the school for other students, who were not born into their race" (Horne, 2007). The legislative child of Horne, HB 2281, granted the Arizona State Superintendent of Public Instruction the ability to withhold funding from any district that utilizes a curriculum that engages in "promoting the overthrow of the United States Government" "promoting resentment toward a race or class of people," "are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group," and "advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals" (State of Arizona, 2010; Okihiro, 2010). Horne asserted that several teachers came forward and gave testimony that the MAS program taught students to hold "anti-Western" sentiment and to "rise up" in an interview following the passage of this legislation (Keyes, 2010).

This silencing legislation also held widespread support amongst the conservative political ranks in the state legislature. Arizona State Representative Steve Montenegro, a co-sponsor of HB 2281, voiced that his rationale behind bringing the bill stemmed from "textbooks they were using, some of them had violent material aimed at inciting violence against another race or class of people" (Fernandez, 2012). John Huppenthal, succeeding Arizona's State Superintendent of Public Instruction from Tom Horne (2011-2015), claimed that "The Mexican-American Studies classes use the same technique that Hitler used in his rise to power" and that "Tucson's public schools are illegally promoting ethnic solidarity and the overthrow of the U.S. government by teaching Mexican history and hip hop" (Planas, 2015, 2017). These public-facing opinions invoke the underlying ideology that engaging in a nonwhite centric curriculum champions the idea of violence and abolishing the American empire for racially minoritized students. As in the previous instance of multiculturalism, these conservative discourses construct ethnic studies as a folk devil, a looming menace to the white racial state. In so doing, conservative politicians advance a project of white epistemological capture. In other words, the advocating for race-neutral rhetoric in the classroom recenters whiteness as the dominant narrative as white hegemonic norms construct the classroom space with the omission of racially minoritized knowledge.

Another strand of conservative thought present across the Ethnic Studies ban is the claim of racial divisiveness encouraged by MAS. Arizona State representative Steve Montenegro shared that Ethnic Studies "promotes an atmosphere or a mentality of 'us versus them,' a minority versus a white culture…It's teaching certain students to be victims because of their race, because of their

gender or because of their ethnicity" (Snyer, 2010). Tom Horne adds to this rhetoric by claiming that "…the [Mexican American Studies] course was presented in a racist manner and violated the other prohibitions pushing ethnic solidarity versus treatment of kids as individuals" and that this curricular construction "…divided students by race. African American students to classroom 1, Mexican American students to classroom 2, etc., just like in the old south" (Horne, 2021). By framing ethnic studies in this light, these political actors actively engage in the stifling of counter-narratives found throughout the MAS curriculum and creating distorted projections of the folk devil. One should note, despite the rhetoric of conservative leaders, ethnic studies classes were open to all students in TUSD.

The primary aim of Tom Horne and other supporters of HB 2281 was not the blockage of teaching about Chicano culture but to stifle discussions around race and power in America (Cammarota, 2017; Dotts, 2015; Orozco, 2012). This intentionality around omitting spaces for race dialogue is not unique to Ethnic Studies but draws parallels to the current Critical Race Theory discourse. Critical Race Theory faces the same specter of white supremacy (race-neutral rhetoric, misinformation campaigns of racial division, and anti-American framings) highlighted by exploring Arizona's Ethnic Studies movement. The pushback against Ethnic Studies and MAS joins the greater conversation of social justice-orientated ideologies (i.e., Critical Race Theory) facing backlash from conservative pundits across the spectrum regarding K-12 education (Romero, 2010). Tom Horne's reemergence as a Superintendent of Public Instruction candidate in Arizona's 2022 primary illuminates this phenomenon as his campaign centers on "creating a hotline to report instruction on critical race theory" (Kunichoff, 2022).

These censoring ideologies hold similar threads of invoking white supremacist rhetoric from antagonists at the local, state, and federal levels. This attempt at recentralizing whiteness as the dominant narrative in the classroom actively dismisses the perspective that racially minoritized youth hold in their learning while simultaneously limiting conversations on whiteness (Duncan-Andrade, 2014). Youth explicitly expressed joy in the culturally relevant curriculum present in the Ethnic studies program that acknowledges who they are and represents them (Delgado, 2013; Gershon, 2017). Consequently, young people showcased their resistance to censoring legislation by engaging in walkouts as a form of resistance (Cabrera et al., 2013; Cabrera et al., 2011; Jensen, 2013). The tension between K-12 education's white supremacist roots and the voices of racially minoritized youth place the classroom as a site of political struggle for all.

Understanding the Bans within the Context of White Supremacy

The past efforts to ban and undermine multiculturalism and ethnic studies mirrors current mobilizations to ban or outlaw critical race theory. This paper was interested in highlighting not how resistance to multiculturalism or ethnic studies sets the stage for our current crisis, but rather how counter-hegemonic knowledges put whiteness into crisis and activates its long foundational practice of white epistemological capture; how the notion of the folk devil is a reoccurring strategic figure that is deployed for the purposes of whiteness. Critically, the desire for ahistorical, distorted accounts of the past, the recentering of whiteness, and the conjuring of the folk devil speaks more to the insidiousness of whiteness than critical race theory—or conjoined equity-centered discourses. Almost any analysis of power, inequity, and difference provokes a type of racial hysteria among whites committed to white epistemological capture and the larger project of white supremacy. The racial hysteria around critical race theory indexes how white supremacy aims to maintain and reproduce itself, as it has done time and time again.

The preservation of white supremacy partly hinges on what philosopher Charles Mills (1997) has framed as a "consensual hallucination" held by those committed to white supremacy through purposeful collective amnesia and distortion. We see this as part of the larger project of white epistemological capture. For Mills what is occurring is a type of enshrining of a collective and structurally mandated inverted epistemology. Mills remarks in reference to these inverted epistemologies,

> [o]ne has an agreement to *mis*interpret the world. One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority…[p]art of what it requires to achieve Whiteness…is a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities…There will be white mythologies…One could say then, as a general rule, that *white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters* related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement. (p. 18-19)

Mills' theorization regarding the role of white inverted epistemologies lays bare the logics of current and past legislation that seeks to actively advance and institutionalize white epistemological capture. By codifying within law and policy such illogics, white epistemological capture sets the stage for a host of material and structural violences.

Additionally, CRT is instructive here in further understanding the bans against it and similar counterhegemonic thought. Central to critical race theory is the notion of the permanence of racism. Advanced by Derrick Bell (1992) and other scholars, the permanence of racism speaks to the durability of racism and its perennial, morphic, and predictable nature (Henry, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2022). It suggests that racism is normal, not aberrant. The historical record affirms the twinned practices of creating the folk devil and white epistemological capture as central to the preservation of whiteness. Bans against CRT, ethnic studies, multiculturalism, and truth are normal, not aberrant; this is the realism of racism.

Relatedly, the construct of whiteness as property aids in our analysis of efforts to ban the freedom of ideas and historical accuracy. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) in their groundbreaking article on critical race theory discuss the role of property as a central governing concept in U.S. jurisprudence. Moreover, they draw on the work of legal scholar Cheryl Harris and her discussion of how whiteness morphs into the ultimate form of property. Harris (1993) states, "possession—the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property—was defined to include only the cultural practices of Whites" (p.1721). Critically, Harris' work illuminates the ways whiteness reinscribes and reproduces its power. While Harris notes the many functions of whiteness, three seem most relevant here (a) the right to use and enjoyment, (b) the absolute right to exclude, and (c) the reputation and status property.

Current anti-truth legislation aims to distort the sordid and painful realities of white supremacy and remove the perspectives and histories of communities of color. Using and enjoying whiteness allows for whites to deploy their power and privilege to craft schooling and curriculum to be privy to and property of whiteness. Relatedly, Harris reminds us that the juridical and social functions of whiteness are to exclude and subjugate. It seems most clear that the curriculum understood as white by conservatives must exclude authentic narratives that are critical of the legacy of white power and white horrors. Such narratives puncture the drag of white innocence and coded

patriotism that silences truth and wars with people of color. As such, to possess and enjoy schooling under the terms of whiteness necessitates the reputation of whiteness remains innocent and pristine. The "psychic" and epistemological comfort of whiteness is privileged to the chagrin of truth and to the mockery of those who live, suffer, and die under white supremacy. Ultimately, whiteness demands that the tainting of "endarkened knowledges" (Dillard, 2010) not diminish its reputation or status. Whiteness as property illuminates how white supremacy has contorted or abandoned truth via white epistemological capture and locates the curriculum as a site for the continual recalibration of the state towards whiteness and the cohering of a normative, innocent white identity. Moreover, the folk devil of emancipatory or counter-hegemonic thought—be it multiculturalism, ethnic studies, or critical race theory—is sacrificed to white anger and disgust.

Coda

The current attacks on critical race theory and other equity related discourses illuminate white supremacists' efforts to conjure the folk devil. These efforts, often under the guise of a moral panic, are part of a longer history of curricular erasure and white epistemological capture. Advocates of white epistemological capture eschew curriculum that disturbs a normative, innocent white identity. In doing so, they advocate for a curriculum based on distortion and psychic safety.

Those committed to educational justice must work to ensure an education that is in the interest of truth and that denounces white supremacy. One must understand that white epistemological capture is a concerted movement among a large network of those committed to proffering an inverted epistemology. Researchers committed to exposing the violence of white supremacy might explore the various shapes of white epistemological capture embedded within the educational enterprise. Here, we explore white epistemological capture in curriculum, traces of it can be found in school discipline, market-based reforms, school funding decisions, and a host of other education policies. Further research might also expand on our conceptualization of white epistemological capture.

We do not want to underemphasize the significance of mobilizing. Grassroots resistance against white epistemological capture must be large-scale and movement based. Working across local, state, and national domains, a cross-sector of actors must speak against unjust policies and legislation, mobilizing both within and outside traditional educational domains. Unjust policies have material implications on schools generally and the day-to-day lives of educators (Jenkins, 2018, 2020). Thus, part of this mobilization is supporting educators and districts committed to educational justice. The mobilizing done in Indiana is a testament to the importance of building a movement to resist white supremacy. Although Indiana has been considered a conservative state, a coalition of educators, parents, and community members defeated SB 167 and HB 1134, which were conservative iterations of " Anti-CRT"/anti-truth bills. We can learn much from cases such as this.

Additionally, we must build spaces and institutions, as those who came before us did, that are committed to educational justice and truth telling. There already are organizations such as the Abolitionist Teaching Network, the Black Youth Project 100, and Rethinking Schools doing consequential work in this area. The African American Policy Forum (AAPF)'s #TruthBeTold Campaign aims to resist anti-truth legislation. It provides resources and strategies for individuals and communities committed to democracy and truth. Moreover, while electoral politics has a troubling history and is often mired in its own limitations, we must also be ambidextrous in our dealings with the hydra of white supremacy. School boards, state and local offices, federal elections all

matter inasmuch as we support and fight for candidates with a progressive and transformative vision for education. Lastly, scholars of education must work with districts and grass roots organizations to do the necessary work of the here and now. How might we be of service to projects of justice?

While the aforementioned approaches are necessarily partial and limited, they are concerted efforts we can take to combat these injustices. We are in a struggle that has a long and arduous history. Some would rather we not know that history. But we are reminded of the words from New Orleans poet, activist, and educator Sunni Patterson: "no matter how treacherous/ they'll try to trap us in them trenches, they'll dig deeper/ ditches/but all that matters is this: which side will we pick? Which path will we choose."

References

Alexander pushes for more choice in education, healthcare. (1999, July 11). *The Arizona Republic* (Phoenix, AZ), 80.

Apple, M. (1993). The politics of official knowledge: Does a national curriculum make sense. *Teachers College Record, 95* (2), 222-241.

Banks, J. (2012). Ethnic studies, citizenship education, and the public good. *Intercultural education, 23*(6), 467-473.

Banks, J. (1981). Education in the 80s: Multiethnic education. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association.

Bell, D. (1992). Racial realism. *Connecticut L. Rev., 24*(2), 363-380.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2012). The invisible weight of whiteness: the racial grammar of everyday life in contemporary America. *Ethnic and Racial Studies 35*(2), 173-194.

Cabrera, N., Meza, E., Romero, A., & Rodríguez, R. (2013). "If there is no struggle, there is no progress": Transformative youth activism and the school of ethnic studies. *The Urban Review*, *45*(1), 7-22.

Cabrera, N., Meza, E., & Rodriguez, C. (2011). The fight for Mexican American studies in Tucson. *NACLA Report on the Americas, 44*(6), 20-24.

Cammarota, J. (2017). Race war in Arizona: Reflections on the ethnic studies ban and white hegemony. *Latino Studies, 15*(4), 522-531.

Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk devils and moral panics.* MacGibbon and Kee Ltd.

Delgado, R. (2013). Precious knowledge: State bans on ethnic studies, book traffickers (Librotraficantes), and a new type of race trial. *N. Carolina L. Rev., 91*(5), 1513-1554.

Dillard, C. B. (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: Examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 13*(5), 661-681.

Dotts, B. W. (2015). Education as Instrument or as Empowerment? Untangling White Privilege in the Politics of Ethnic Studies: The Case of the Tucson Unified School District. Multicultural Education, 22, 35-38.

Dumas, M. (2014). 'Losing an arm': Schooling as a site of black suffering. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 17* (1), 1-29.

Duncan-Andrade, J. (2014). Deconstructing the doublethink aimed at dismantling ethnic studies in Tucson. In J. Cammarota & A. Romero (Eds.), *Raza studies: The public option for educational revolution* (pp. 159-170). University of Arizona Press.

Draper, N. (October 26, 1997). Diversity rule for schools stirs debate: A State Board of Education plan to set new requirements for multicultural studies and monitoring student performance is drawing concerns from opponents and supporters alike. *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN).

Fernandez, V. (2012). AZ Students Walk Out Over Mexican-American Studies Ban. New York Public Radio. Retrieved from: https://www.wnyc.org/story/184589-az-students-walk-out-over-mexican-american-studies-ban/

Goode, E. & Ben-Yehuda, N. (1994). *Moral panics: the social construction of deviance.* Blackwell Publishers.

Gordon, B. (1997). Curriculum, policy, and African American cultural knowledge: Challenged and possibilities for the year 2000 and beyond. *Educational Policy 11*(2), 227-242.

Gorski, P. & EdChange (November 1999). A Brief History of Multicultural Education. EdChange. http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/edchange_history.html

Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clark, J., Roberts, B. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order.* The Macmillan Press Ltd.

Harris, C. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard L. Rev., 106*(8), 1707-1791.

H.B. 2281, 2010 49th Legislature, 2010 Second Reg. Sess. (AZ 2010). https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf

Henry, K. (2022). A movement in two acts: Actually existing racism, critical race theory, and the charter school movement. In M.Lynn and A.D. Dixson (Eds.), *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (2nd ed., pp. 427-439). Routledge.

Henry, K. (2021). "The price of disaster": The charter school authorization process in post-Katrina New Orleans. *Educational Policy, 35*(2), 235-258.

Henry, K. (2019). Heretical discourses in post-Katrina charter school applications. *American Educational Research Journal, 56*(6), 2609-2643.

Henry, K. (2016). Discursive violence and economic retrenchment: Chartering the sacrifice of Black educators in post-Katrina New Orleans. In J.K. Donnor & T.L. Affolter (Eds.), *The charter school solution: Distinguishing fact from rhetoric* (pp.80-98). Routledge.

Hines, R. (1994). House Rejects Report On Alternative Ed Bill. Daily Oklahoman. Retrieved from https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/1994/05/27/house-rejects-report-on-alternative-ed-bill/62424316007/

Horne, T. (2007). An open letter to the citizens of Tucson. State of Arizona Department of Education. Retrieved from http://www.faculty.umb.edu/lawrence_blum/courses/CCT627_10/readings/horne_open_letter_tucson.pdf

Horne, T. (2021). Tom Horne's Fifteen-Year War Against Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory. Tom Horne for Superintendent. Retrieved from https://www.electtomhorne.com/blog/tom-horne-against-critical-race-theory.

Jensen, B. (2013). Chapter Six: Race Erased? Arizona's Ban on Ethnic Studies. *Counterpoints*, *445*, 81-100. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42982034

Keyes, A. (2010). New AZ Law Targets 'Ethnic Studies' Programs. National Public Radio. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126797959

Kleibard, H. (1987). *The struggle for the American curriculum 1893-1958.* Routledge.

Kunichoff, Y. (2022). Arizona superintendent of public instruction candidate Tom Horne aims for 3rd term. Retrieved from https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/elections/2022/07/11/tom-horne-arizona-school-superintendent-primary-2022-candidate/7630097001/

Jenkins, D. (2018). From segregation to congregation: A case study of community engaged urban school reform. Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles. ProQuest.
Jenkins, D. (2020). School reputation as a site of struggle: An investigation of the impact of school choice in Washington, DC on a neighborhood public school. The Urban Review, 52(5), 904-923.
Jenkins, D. (2021). Unspoken grammar of place: Anti-Blackness as a spatial imaginary in education. Journal of School Leadership, 31(1-2), 107-126.
Ladson-Billings, G. (2022). Critical race theory—what it is not! In M.Lynn and A.D. Dixson (Eds.), *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (2nd ed., pp. 32-43). Routledge.
Ladson-Billings, G. (2018). The social funding of race: the role of schooling. *Peabody Journal of Education, 93*(1), 90-105.
Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W.F., IV (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record 97*(1), 47-68.
Leo, J. (1992, September 28). Electioneering by race. U.S. News & World Report. Retrieved from https://www.lexisnexis.com/en-us/professional/academic/nexis-uni.page
Matias, C. E. (2016). "Why do you make me hate myself?": Re-teaching whiteness, abuse, and love in urban teacher education. *Teaching Education, 27*(2), 194-211.
Matias, C.E. (2016b). *Feeling white: Whiteness, emotionality, and education.* Sense Publishers.
Mills, C. W. (1997). *The racial contract.* Cornell University Press.
Monteiro, K. (2010, July 4). Who gets to define Ethnic Studies. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/who-gets-to-define-ethnic-studies/
Multicultural education takes hits. (1995, September 22). *Lincoln Star Journal* (Lincoln, NE), 32
Okihiro, G. (2010, July 4). The field is under assault from without and within. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-future-of-ethnic-studies/
Orozco, R. (2012). Racism and power: Arizona politicians' use of the discourse of anti-Americanism against Mexican American Studies. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 34*(1), 43-60.
Owens, K. (2018). "In Lak'ech," The Chicano clap, and fear: A partial rhetorical autopsy of Tucson's now-illegal ethnic studies classes. *College English, 80*(3), 247-270.
Pinar, W. (2012). *What is curriculum theory?* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
Planas, R. (2015, January 14). Arizona Education Officials Say It's Illegal to Recite This Poem in School. Huffington Post. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/in-laketch_n_6464604
Planas, R. (2017, June 28). Arizona Republican Details 'Eternal' Struggle Against Mexican-American Studies. Huffington Post. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/arizona-republican-mexican-american-studies_n_59532c52e4b05c37bb7a68ad
Resolution to prevent the adoption of certain national history standards, S. Res. 66, 104th Cong. (1995).
Romero, A. F. (2010). At war with the state in order to save the lives of our children: The battle to save ethnic studies in Arizona. *The Black Scholar, 40*(4), 7-15.
State of Arizona. Arizona State Legislature. (2010) H.B. 2281 Retrieved from https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/hb2281s.pdf
Stovall, D. (2013). "Fightin' the Devil 24/7": Context, community, and critical race praxis in education. In M. Lynn and A.D. Dixson (Eds.), *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (pp. 289-301). Routledge.

Snyer, S. (2010). Panel votes unanimously for ban on classes that 'promote' hatred. Arizona Capital Times. Retrieved from https://azcapitoltimes.com/news/2010/02/18/panel-votes-unanimously-for-ban-on-classes-that-'promote-hatred'/

Walters, L. (July 8, 1991). Call for a Multicultural Curriculum Stirs Up Controversy in New York. Christian Science Monitor (Boston, MA). https://advancelexiscom.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SJB-57B0-0012-253H-00000-00&context=1516831.

Watkins, W. (1993). Black curriculum orientation: A preliminary inquiry. *Harvard Education Review, 63 (3), 321-338.*

Yancy, G. (2008). *Black bodies, white gazes: The continuing significance of race.* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

(1994, June 10) FL 05: BIG DADDY FLAMES OUT. The Hotline. Retrieved from https://www.lexisnexis.com/en-us/professional/academic/nexis-uni.page