

The (Racially Neutral) Politics of Education: A Critical Race Theory Perspective

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Although Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the legal arena, its influence has proliferated throughout the social sciences literature. Yet CRT has not spread significantly into the field of educational leadership, where the discourse on diversity has failed to penetrate the salience of racism in schooling. The purpose of this article is to confront the silence on race in schools and to summon scholars in the politics of education to critical analysis of race as an issue in public schools.

Keywords: *politics of education; politics of race in education; Critical Race Theory*

A few days prior to writing the introduction to this article, I received an “urgent” e-mail from a student enrolled in my School/Community Relations course in 2002. The student, an assistant principal at a local elementary school, is one of the most active and engaged in the class. His e-mail was part of a journaling assignment in which students write their reflections about class discussions. This particular discussion focused on the lingering pervasiveness of racism in society and the need to understand its effects on communities of color. The e-mail is reproduced in full below:

I’m really enjoying this class thus far. I think the discussions are great and are very thought provoking. I have certainly learned a lot in the past few weeks! However, I have a small problem with some of the issues Dr. Lopez raised in yesterday’s class. Although the topic of racism is certainly important, I feel that he tends to “blame” one particular group (i.e., Euro-Americans) as being responsible for racism in society. Such generalizations are as bad, or perhaps worse, than the stereotypes and generalizations made of people of color on an everyday basis! In other words, this type of “finger-pointing” does NOTHING to resolve the issue of racism in society. On the contrary, it only perpetuates the problem by lumping all “white people” into one homogenous group! Isn’t this just another form of stereotyping?

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I don't believe that "white people" are the only instigators of racism in this society. For example, there are black hate groups, such as The National of Islam [*sic*], that preach hatred toward anyone who is not an African American. This is racism plain and simple. Why should there be a double standard for "white" hate groups and "black" hate groups? Racism is rooted in IGNORANCE, and not in [social] power. If we are to make any type of progress on racial issues, then we need to stop looking for a group to "blame," and fix people's ignorance first.

The concerns raised by this student, although certainly valid, are not new or unfamiliar. In fact, this type of logic is quite prevalent in American popular ideology: where racism is perceived as an individual and irrational act in a world that is otherwise neutral, rational, and just (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). This view of racism is rooted in the Civil Rights discourse of the 1950s and 1960s and posits that in an ideal world, people are—and ought to be—"colorblind" (Farley, 2002; Gotanda, 1995). Although this is certainly a laudable goal, it positions racism at the individual level and ignores other ways in which it functions in society.

Racism, in other words, has been reduced to broad generalizations about another group based on the color of their skin. It has become an individual construction as opposed to a social and/or civilizational construct (Scheurich & Young, 1997; Young & Laible, 2000). In this regard, racism is not necessarily connected to the larger "distribution of jobs, power, prestige, and wealth" (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiv) but is viewed as deviant behaviors and/or attitudes in an otherwise neutral world. The belief that colorblindness will eliminate racism is not only shortsighted but reinforces the notion that racism is a personal—as opposed to systemic—issue (Matsuda, 1996; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tatum, 1997; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002; Williams, 1995b).

By ignoring this broader sociological web of power in which racism functions, individuals can readily equate White racism with Black nationalism. This slippage only serves to protect the idea of a neutral social order by moving the focus away from the barriers and inequities that exist in society and refocusing it on the "ignorant" individual(s). As a result, the collective frustrations of people of color and/or Black nationalist groups are simply seen as irrational—their struggle and plight to end racism are, in effect, reduced to a deviant form of "reverse" racism (see also Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, in press). This slippage only maintains racism firmly in place by ignoring or downplaying the role of White racism in the larger social order.

To be certain, racism has never waned in society; it has merely been manifested in different forms. However, the discourse on racism has shifted through time, such that overt and/or blatant acts of hate (e.g., name calling,

lynching, hate crimes, etc.) have only been identified as being racist (Crenshaw, 2002; Hayman & Levit, 2002). This focus on explicit acts has ignored the subtle, hidden, and often insidious forms of racism that operate at a deeper, more systemic level. When racism becomes “invisible,” individuals begin to think that it is merely a thing of the past and/or only connected to the specific act. Rarely is racism seen as something that is always present in society and in our daily lives (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes et al., 2002).

For example, when I was coteaching a summer course for preservice principals, I was “given” the responsibility for teaching a special section on diversity.¹ Halfway through my presentation, I was interrupted by a student—a White middle school principal in a rural district—who declared,

With all due respect Dr. López, I come from a pretty homogenous district. All of my students are basically White. We’ve never had any diversity in my district and we probably never will have any diversity either. When are we moving on to the more important stuff?

Statements such as these not only embody a very limited understanding of race and race relations but also presuppose that racism is not an important topic of study for today’s educational leaders (see also Lomotey, 1995; Parker & Shapiro, 1992; Young & Laible, 2000). Such assertions also naively suggest there is very little to be learned from diversity—and that the “important stuff” in educational leadership is not about creating schools that work for all children but rest in the more technical matters of school finance, organizational theory, leadership theory, and other staple topics.

Unfortunately, these beliefs are informed by the very structure of our leadership preparation programs. Quite simply, preparation programs across the nation do very little to equip students with a cogent understanding of racism and race relations (Laible & Harrington, 1998; Lomotey, 1995; Parker & Shapiro, 1992; Reyes, Velez, & Peña, 1993; Young & Laible, 2000). Moreover, when these topics are introduced, they are often relegated to special topics courses or seminars that are not part of the core curriculum of leadership preparation. This not only relegates race to a theoretical footnote within the larger discourse of educational leadership but also fails to probe how issues of race intersect and permeate the educational landscape.

As scholars who prepare future educational leaders, we have a duty to know and raise questions about race and racism in society, as well as an ethical responsibility to interrogate systems, organizational frameworks, and leadership theories that privilege certain groups and/or perspectives over others (Capper, 1993; Donmoyer, Imber, & Scheurich, 1995). We also have a

duty to challenge oppression in all forms and an obligation to interrogate how schools and administrators oftentimes silence students who are culturally different (Larson, 1997; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). We have a duty to transform schools from being sorting mechanisms in the larger global market—where people of color, women, and the disenfranchised are prepared to fit a particular role in society (Anyon, 1980; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977)—to being institutions of hope and social change. However, we cannot adequately prepare future leaders to achieve these goals if we avoid exposing them to issues of race, racism, and racial politics and demonstrate to them how these issues still permeate the educational landscape (Parker & Shapiro, 1992).

Clearly, what we teach in administrator preparation programs is insufficient—especially in this rapidly changing demographic and linguistically diverse society. School leaders must be prepared to work with individuals who are culturally different and help create learning environments that foster respect, tolerance, and intercultural understanding. They must also have an awareness of the effect of racism and how it intersects with other areas of difference such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, and class oppression. Unfortunately, as Young and Laible (2000) suggested, “White educators and educational leaders do not have a thorough enough understanding of racism in its many manifestations . . . nor do they comprehend the ways in which they are perpetuating White racism in their schools” (p. 375). We must take proactive steps to address this problem by revisiting our knowledge base and critically interrogate how race fits in to the larger discourse of what educational leaders are supposed to know and be able to do.

Taken holistically, we need to develop antiracist educators who recognize the reproductive functions of schooling and have the courage to envision different possibilities for schooling—particularly for our most marginalized youth and communities. These leaders will, no doubt, require a new set of tools, mindsets, and dispositions than what is commonly taught in leadership preparation programs (Capper, 1993; Donmoyer et al., 1995). As Young and Laible (2000) attested, “If changes are not made, educational administration programs will continue to produce primarily white, middle class administrators with little understanding of or interest in the institutionalized system of white privilege, oppression, and racism” (p. 388). In short, a critical reevaluation of the knowledge base in educational leadership must be made to address this toxic trend (see also Capper, 1993; Donmoyer et al., 1995; Ortiz & Ortiz, 1995; Sanford, 1995; Scribner, López, Koschoreck, Mahitivanichcha, & Scheurich, 1999).

Given the rapidly changing demographic profile of the United States, the study of the politics of education has never been of greater importance. In

today's schools, educational leaders must interact with a diverse array of constituents—many of whom are from different cultural backgrounds and speak languages other than English. Today's administrators must not only be able to successfully navigate these cultural divisions, but must also have a thorough understanding of political systems, intergovernmental relations, micropolitics, community participation, interest groups, and theories of power and conflict to effectively do their job. Indeed, today's educational leaders must not only be culturally savvy but politically savvy as well.

In the section that follows, I provide readers with a broad overview of educational politics and policy and discuss how these theories are insufficient in preparing educational leaders to work in diverse communities. Specifically, I discuss how one popular political theory ignores critical issues of race, leaving us with a partial understanding of conflict and power as well as a sanitized view of racial politics in the United States. I will then examine how this decontextualized and deracialized narrative fosters an inability to critically confront racism and racist educational policy. I then conclude with a call to unmask the hidden faces of racism in all its forms—using an emerging area of legal scholarship known as Critical Race Theory (CRT)—beginning with a critical examination of our own collective practices and knowledge base.

REVISITING THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

Since its inception, the study of the educational politics has largely, if not exclusively, centered around the central question of “who gets what, when and how” (Lasswell, 1936) and how those interactions, decisions, and processes highlight the “authoritative allocation of values” (Easton, 1965). Stated somewhat differently, the politics of education has focused on those mechanisms—formal and informal, visible and unseen—by which individuals, or groups of individuals, influence the decision-making process as well as the resulting policy outcomes (Stout, Tallerico, & Scribner, 1994). Such mechanisms of influence include conflict and its resolution (Schattschneider, 1960), power (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; French & Raven, 1999; Lutz, 1977), pressure and influence tactics (Dye & Zeigler, 1970; Sroufe, 1981), agenda setting (Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Sroufe, 1981), voting behavior (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Wirt & Kirst, 1982), “and any number of related ideas including the age-old ‘dirty politics’” (Scribner & Englert, 1977, p. 21). Educational politics, therefore, emerges from the underlying tensions surrounding competing values and interests, as well as the processes and mechanisms by which those tensions get resolved (Iannaccone, 1967, 1977; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Wirt & Kirst, 1982).

Despite the valuable contributions of this line of inquiry, there is a perception that the focus and scholarship in the field has remained largely unchanged since its inception (Wong, 1995). In fact, by the mid-1970s, Scribner and Englert (1977) had all but identified the core operational concepts that captured the essence of the field as a whole. These four concepts—government, power, conflict, and policy—depicted a wide array of political practices and actions, yet were substantive enough to ensure that the concept was not generically employed. Although various researchers and scholars have focused on a variety of topics and interests within the politics of education, utilizing a wide range of lenses that extend from sociology to economics, these four concepts have served as comprehensive archetypes that structure much of the work we do in the field.

For example, the work on government emphasizes the role of schools as state agencies, and the role of the federal government in influencing educational policy through fiscal, legal, and political means (see also Grodzins, 1966; Mazzoni, 1995; Sroufe, 1995). It also addresses issues of state and local control (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970) and how state education agencies, local districts, and school buildings navigate the federal terrain while being accountable to local constituencies (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978; Wirt & Kirst, 1982; Zeigler, Jennings, & Peak, 1974). Other work in this area highlights the role of political culture and the relationship between a group's political orientation and their patterns of government and civic participation (Almond & Verba, 1965; Elazar, 1972). As a whole, this area highlights the role of inter- and intragovernmental relationships, and how those relationships influence and affect public values, political action, and educational policy (Dye, 1998).

The second arena—the study of power (see also Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Dunlap & Goldman, 1991; French & Raven, 1999; Gaventa, 1980; Lukes, 1974; Pfeffer, 1981)—surrounds issues of control, decision making, and influence, as well as how power shapes social relationships, policy identification, and policy outcomes. As a theoretical concept, power has moved beyond positional understandings of authority, or “power over” (Morgan, 1997; Yukl, 2000), and has extended into other areas such as special interest groups (Berry, 1984; Davies & Zerchykov, 1981; Dye & Zeigler, 1970; Truman, 1951), political lobbying (Sroufe, 1981, 1995), and a wide variety of political actions that highlight the role of power in society. Although newer work in this area attempts to redefine power by identifying its hidden manifestations (Anderson, 1990; Brunner, 2000; Dunlap & Goldman, 1991; Marshall & Anderson, 1994), the vast majority of the work in this area focuses on power as a vehicle by which things get done in the organization (Pfeffer, 1981), as well as who benefits from those decisions (Marshall, 1997a, 1997b).

The third arena—the study of conflict—also continues to play a central role in the field. Conflict is important because it highlights the various tensions involved when values, mores, and beliefs of different constituencies are at odds (Morgan, 1997; Schattschneider, 1960; Stout et al., 1994), when there is an imbalance between constituent needs and policy outputs (Wirt & Kirst, 1982), or when there is competition over limited resources and/or their allocation (Lutz, 1977). In these situations, conflict is resolved when one party asserts some type of power or influence over the situation. The influence may take the form of conflict socialization (Schattschneider, 1960), collective bargaining (Young, 1991), voting behavior (Wirt & Kirst, 1982), or political pressure (Sroufe, 1981; Truman, 1951) to influence decision making in a particular direction. In this regard, the study of conflict is closely related to the study of power. In essence, power is the primary vehicle through which conflict gets resolved (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

The fourth arena—the study of educational policy—includes formal/judicial mandates, such as federal laws and state regulations, as well as informal practices and customs, such as unspoken or hidden organizational rules and operations (Cibulka, 1994; Marshall & Anderson, 1994). Policy not only determines what gets done but how decisions get done and by whom. In this regard, policy is an action or an output that results from the political process. However, policy can also be an inaction, a decision not made, or what Dye (cited in Cibulka, 1994, p. 106) called “what governments choose not to do.” In other words, policy focuses on the visible as well as invisible mechanisms that structure organizational life. To influence policy, one must be in a position to make political decisions (Dye & Zeigler, 1970; Sroufe, 1981), have access to key decision makers or their staff (Sroufe, 1995), or pose a threat as a politically active and viable constituency (Sroufe, 1981).

Interrogating Racism Within the Politics of Education

Unfortunately, the vast majority of tactics and mechanisms privileged in the field emerge from a strong belief in the democratic process—providing a somewhat optimistic take on the efficacy of political and civic participation. Such strategies not only ignore the political fact that power and influence largely remain the dominion of White, middle-class men (Marshall, 1997a), but they also disregard the fact that the vast majority of underrepresented groups do not largely participate in these kinds of political activity (Arax, 1986; Bush, 1984; Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Gaventa, 1980; Preston, Henderson, & Puryear, 1987). In other words, although these theories support and strengthen our collective beliefs in democracy, political action,

representational politics, influence, accountability, and the importance of a whole host of input factors in the decision-making process, they nevertheless fail to address why certain individuals fail to participate in the political process altogether and/or how and why the “democratic” process itself marginalizes and silences diverse peoples, their actions, and their perspectives (Marshall, 1993a; Marshall et al., 1989).

Willis Hawley (1977) recognized the limitations of the field almost three decades ago when he stated:

Whether one accepts Lasswell’s definition [of “who gets what when and how”] or other such widely held and related conceptions that politics involves the authoritative allocation of resources and values, my point is the same—political scientists have been more interested in studying the political *processes* than they have been in studying who receives what benefits from the political process. (p. 319)

As Hawley suggested, scholars in the field are more concerned with “input” and “process” factors, and not necessarily with the outcomes and effects of the political process. The focus on one aspect, to the detriment of the other, certainly has been a shortcoming in the field.

This is a critically important point, because the outcome of policy can be tangible and identifiable (such as the effects of a public policy on a particular group) or intangible and anomalous (such as people’s perceptions of the political system). As Schram (1995) contended, the field disproportionately suffers from an “overly instrumental view of rationality that masks its latent biases” (p. 375). Certainly, the relentless belief in the effectiveness of political and civic participation is itself a type of bias that is often taken for granted by most scholars in the field.

Within the politics of education, we assume that all (legal) citizens of this society have certain inalienable rights—including the right to vote to ensure that government and policies work in their best interest. The field also assumes that all individuals act in politically rational ways and, when necessary, will assert their rights as citizens—through influence, power, conflict, political pressure, voting, or some other mechanism—to minimize real and opportunity costs.

Unfortunately, for the vast majority of people of color, the working poor, women, gays/lesbians/bisexuals, and other marginalized groups—who are constantly reminded on a daily basis that they are second-class citizens in this country—the concept of rights is elusive. Their treatment, in historical and contemporary times, attests to the fact that they have never been afforded their full rights as citizens of this country (Delgado, 1997; Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Guinier, 1991; Preston et al., 1987; Spann, 1995; Williams,

1995b). For people of color, their subordination has not only been socially sanctioned but legally sanctioned as well:

As the "Other," racial minorities have often been neither thought of nor treated as Americans. Historically they have by a number of legal and informal means been excluded from buying property in certain areas, prohibited from voting, and restricted as to whom they could marry. In practice, full American citizenship has been restricted to Whites. Over many years of struggle, rights have been extended and the concept of who belongs to America has expanded. Even so, racial and gender discrimination continue to create real differences in opportunities and in people's perception of their treatment. (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997, p. 58)

If having rights is part of being an American citizen (Flores, 1997), then clearly, racial minorities in the United States are far from full incorporation in this regard. They may be equal members of society under the law—but socially, politically, and economically, they are rendered one down by a racist political and legal system that marginalizes them on an everyday basis. As Slater and Boyd (1999) suggested, individuals can be members of the larger polity but may not necessarily be afforded equal status in the larger polity.

Therefore, to suggest that all individuals have equal rights under the law and have equal ability and potential to exercise those rights via political action and/or influence—in other words, to suggest that all individuals, irrespective of race or power, act in politically rational ways—is not only shortsighted but disingenuous. It suggests the public space is racially neutral and that contextual factors do not matter in the larger social and political arena.

As a whole, issues of racial avoidance are not at all uncommon. For example, in educational administration, very few individuals have had a critical dialogue about the role of racism in society—and more specifically, racism in our beliefs, ideas, practices, and knowledge bases (Donmoyer et al., 1995; Scribner et al., 1999). Within the politics of education, discussions of racism have also been largely avoided. Although we often have important conversations surrounding the core concepts of "power, conflict, government, and policy," rarely have we had a provocative discussion of race and racism and how they affect the field (for some exceptions, see Anderson & Herr, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Marshall, 1993a, 1993b, 1997a; Marshall & Anderson, 1994; Marshall et al., 1989; Risvi, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997).

This is not to suggest that the politics of education arena is impervious to issues that directly affect people of color. Rather, it merely suggests that the field as a whole has not moved away from its traditional roots in political science, its heavy reliance on theories of participatory democracy, and its

emphasis surrounding the incontestable benefits of commonly accepted civic practices such as voting, political action, social movements, and other influence strategies. In this regard, the politics of education takes for granted a key assumption surrounding the efficacy of American “democracy” while simultaneously viewing the public space as racially neutral.

The next section provides an example of one popular political theory in education—Schattschneider’s theory of the socialization of conflict—and how this concept largely ignores issues of race and racism. By taking a more historical approach, I will attempt to reveal how Schattschneider’s examples lead to a decontextualized and deracialized political theory of conflict, yielding a sanitized view of racial politics in the United States. I argue that these theories produce a racially neutral understanding of educational politics and policy while fostering an inability to critically understand the role of race and racism in the larger social order.

“COLORBLIND” POLITICAL THEORY: AN EXAMPLE

In 1960, E. E. Schattschneider published an interesting book entitled *The Semisovereign People*, which aimed to provide a more realist account of democracy in America. His basic tenet, outlined in the introductory chapter, was that the policy arena is not necessarily influenced by the conflicting interests of policy actors per se, but by the “contagiousness of conflict” (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 2), or the extent and scope of external audience participation. By highlighting the notion that “every conflict consists of two parts: (1) the few individuals who are actively engaged at the center and (2) the audience that is irresistibly attracted to the scene” (p. 2), Schattschneider suggested that the socialization of conflict was the lifeblood of policy and politics. He believed that every conflict had the potential of creating a “chain reaction” (p. 2) and that the outcome of the conflict was, itself, determined by this reaction. This not only led him to conclude that the audience “plays a decisive role in the outcome of a fight” (p. 2), but that the management and control of conflict was essentially the heart of the political process.

What struck me most about this book and its introductory chapter was not the theoretical proposition surrounding the socialization of conflict—which makes sense from the view of traditional participatory democracy—but the example he used to support his premise. In his example, Schattschneider made reference to a 1943 fight between a Black soldier and a White police officer in New York City which resulted in public riot and mass demonstration by African Americans.

In his retelling of this event, Schattschneider (1960) provided a rather descriptive account that was almost storylike in nature:

On a hot afternoon in August, 1943, in the Harlem section of New York City a Negro soldier and a White policeman got into a fight in the lobby of a hotel. News of the fight spread rapidly throughout the area. In a few minutes angry crowds gathered in front of the hotel, at the police station and at the hospital to which the injured policeman was taken. Before order could be restored about four hundred people were injured and millions of dollars' worth of property was destroyed. (p. 1)

The riot being described—the second to occur in New York City within an 8-year period—was certainly not a unique or isolated event. In fact, in 1943, similar disturbances occurred in Los Angeles and Detroit, riots that also resulted in death, arrests, and millions of dollars in property damage.

Although Schattschneider (1960) suggested that the Harlem event was “not a race riot” (p. 1)—a sentiment that echoed the beliefs of former New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia and former African American New York City congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (Capeci, 1977)—the fact of the matter was that the two individuals at the center of the conflict were of different races. Moreover, evidence overwhelmingly finds that the Harlem riot was, indeed, a direct result of racial discrimination, general frustration with police brutality, and the lack of equal opportunity for Blacks in the postwar era (Capeci, 1977). In this regard, the story of conflict as told by Schattschneider is devoid of the overall context and historical circumstances that led up to the event in question.

Although most accounts of the 1943 Harlem riots suggest the fight was, indeed, the spark that started the uproar (Feagan & Hahn, 1973; Garrett, 1961), very few accounts provide a more holistic and contextual view of this event (e.g., see Capeci, 1977; Orlans, 1943).² For example, the historical analysis of Capeci (1977) suggests that African Americans in New York City lived under severe conditions that were exacerbated by World War I and the Great Depression. His research finds that African Americans in Harlem—as well as in most other parts of the United States—had higher unemployment rates, were the first to get fired from their jobs when the economy suffered, and were the last to be offered temporary employment from the Federal Emergency Relief Bureau during the Depression years.

In addition, Capeci's (1977) research suggests that White worker's unions also limited or denied membership to African Americans, or “refused to issue union cards until Blacks found jobs, knowing they could not get work without the cards” (p. 36). This type of blatant discrimination in employment practices was particularly acute in New York City because it disproportionately

suffered from gross underemployment during the war years compared to the rest of the nation. For African Americans living in Harlem, the effect was intensified by a general increase in the cost of living, dilapidated and rat-infested housing stock, severe overcrowding, malnutrition, inferior health facilities, and lack of access to quality schools (Capeci, 1977). The blatant enforcement of Jim Crow laws only made matters worse because it justified overt discrimination and institutionalized racist practices.

Despite the fact that the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor ushered in a renewed sense of national unity, most African Americans fully recognized the irony of supporting a war in the name of democracy, given the virtual absence of “democracy” for them in the United States (Capeci, 1977; Hughes, 1986; Powell, 1971). The paradox of fighting a racist Hitler abroad while allowing and encouraging racism at home seemed overly hypocritical to most people of color. Without a doubt, the war only served to heighten existing racial divisions, as White and non-White workers increasingly competed for scarce resources (jobs, housing, government relief, etc.) and as racism and oppression festered into resentment and frustration in Black and Latino communities.

Needless to say, the social milieu and overall racial climate was particularly tense during this period in history. The slightest incident had the potential of setting off the collective anger and indignation of marginalized communities—an anger that would be met with equal resistance from White Americans who viewed African American and Latino zoot suiters as unpatriotic (Orlans, 1943).

In this regard, the context and background that led up to the conflict on that “hot afternoon in August” is just as important as the incident itself. In other words, there is a story behind the story that is as telling as the narrative and outcome of what is told by Schattschneider. In this case, the 1943 Harlem riot is not solely about a scuffle or conflict between two individuals. Rather, it is a story of inequality, racism, oppression, frustration, and the larger struggle for social justice.³

In fact, the story behind the Harlem riot begins not with two men fighting. Rather, it begins when a young woman, Marjorie Polite, asked to switch rooms at Harlem’s Braddock Hotel—a hotel that was under constant police surveillance for suspected prostitution activity (Capeci, 1977; Orlans, 1943). When Ms. Polite realized the room to which she was switched lacked shower and bathing facilities, she asked for a refund of her money. Prior to checking out, however, Polite insisted on the return of a dollar tip she had given the hotel elevator operator (Capeci, 1977; Guzman, 1947). When the operator denied receiving the tip, Ms. Polite became angry and contentious. A White police officer, James Collins, who was assigned to “raided premise duty” in

the hotel, then asked Ms. Polite to leave the premises. Ms. Polite, however, refused to leave without the return of her money. This prompted Collins to arrest Polite for “disorderly” conduct (Capeci, 1977).

Witnessing this incident, Robert Bandy—an off-duty African American military policeman—and his mother, Florine Roberts, attempted to intervene in the altercation and arrest (Capeci, 1977; Orlans, 1943). Officer Collins reacted by withdrawing his nightstick, waving it at Bandy and his mother, and insisting they move away from the scene. Bandy, however, intercepted the weapon, which compelled Officer Collins to draw his pistol (Guzman, 1947). Not wanting to risk injury to himself or his mother, Bandy hit Collins in the leg with the nightstick and began to run. The officer shot Bandy when he refused to stop, wounding Bandy in the arm.

In short, the incident in question did not begin as a fight at all. Rather, it involved two individuals trying to protect the civil rights of a fellow African American who was merely trying to reclaim her property. When the situation fell awry and tensions mounted, the police officer drew a weapon. Bandy, it appears, hit the officer in an attempt to protect his mother, and perhaps himself, from harm. The riot ensued when rumors spread that a “White police officer had killed a Black soldier . . . who had been protecting his mother” (Capeci, 1977). In effect, the conflict was socialized, but its socialization had more to do with police abuse, fairness, and equal justice as opposed to the contagiousness or mere spectacle of the fight.

My point, however, is not to criticize Schattschneider or his theory. Rather, it is to suggest that conflict—particularly conflict that involves people of color—is contextual. The fact that it was a Black person who was involved in a confrontation with a White police officer changes the dynamics and context of the Harlem “riots.” Would a riot have occurred had it been two White individuals who were fighting? What if the officer in question was an African American? Would there have been a riot if the constitutional and civil rights of people of color were not constantly violated by police and other government officials? Would things have been any different if the economic and social situation in Harlem were substantially different for African Americans? Questions such as these need to be raised because they substantially alter our understanding of the conflict as well as its outcome.

Our understanding of events, as told by Schattschneider and others, suggests that the incident was not in any way a race riot. Such negation not only suggests the riot had nothing to do with racism but altogether disregards the pent-up frustration and rage of the African American community. The reason for this mislabeling, in my opinion, has to do with a constricted understanding of what constitutes a race riot. For Schattschneider (1960), the event in question failed to meet this definition because “most of the shops looted and

the property destroyed by the Negro mob belonged to Negroes” (p. 2). For Mayor La Guardia and Congressman Powell, the event was not a race riot because there was no “physical violence between Blacks and Whites” (Capeci, 1977). In essence, a race riot, according to these definitions, can only occur if there are objective facts or discernable evidence of violence between two groups. Anything short of direct contact or aggression fails to be included in this definition.

By refusing to label the 1943 incident a race riot, individuals not only strip the event of its racial underpinnings but render its social and political significance meaningless. The riot becomes a mere conflict, where chaos and destruction ruled for a short period of time. In effect, such reasoning leads us to believe that the public boiling-over of African Americans had little to do with racism or the reality of being Black in a White society. Instead, it becomes an unfortunate and isolated incident that simply got out of hand.

Moreover, because individuals failed to identify racism as a key element of the riot, White power and privilege were protected and reified. Because Blacks were not “rioting” against a White power structure, there was no need to fundamentally change the social and living conditions for African Americans in Harlem. Although the riots did open the possibility for increased political representation for Black Americans, there was little fundamental change in social and economic power relations between Blacks and Whites. As such, the overall event and public protest did little to substantially alter the gross social and economic inequities in New York City during this particular period in history.

How could Schattschneider—along with other key political figures, researchers, and scholars—not see racism as an underlying cause of this riot? Why was this incident not labeled a race riot, despite the fact that the collective anger of African Americans was targeted mainly at symbols of White power such as the New York Police Department? How could Schattschneider use an example that describes blatant racial conflict without highlighting issues of White supremacy and social power? Answers to these questions rest, in part, on the fact that racism and its effects are rarely discussed or acknowledged in society (Omi & Winant, 1986; Tatum, 1997; West, 1993a). There is a problematic silence that surrounds issues of racism—a silence that is difficult to broach. In fact, most people would rather not discuss racism whatsoever because the topic itself is uncomfortable and unpleasant (Anzaldúa, 1990; Tatum, 1997; West, 1993a, 1993b).

As a result of this disquieting silence, most individuals fail to identify its magnitude and breadth and limit its scope to superficial manifestations like prejudice, discrimination, and blatant intolerance (Delgado & Stefancic, 1995, 2001; Matsuda, 1996; Tatum, 1997). In fact, most people view racism

as the enactment of overt racial acts—for example, name calling, burning crosses, hate crimes, and so forth—while ignoring the deeper, often invisible, and more insidious forms of racism that occur on a daily basis (Parker, 1998; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tyson, 1998).

In addition, when discussions of racism do occur, people overwhelmingly focus on explicit acts, believing that racism is perpetrated by “bad people” who dislike others because of something as arbitrary and innocuous as their skin color. Although this type of blatant racism certainly does occur, such a belief incorrectly assumes that it is only found at this surface level and does not penetrate our institutions, organizations, or ways of thinking (Bell, 1995b; Delgado, 1995a; Omi & Winant, 1986; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tatum, 1997; Williams, 1995a, 1995b). This limited perspective, therefore, only protects White privilege by highlighting racism’s blatant and conspicuous aspects, while ignoring or downplaying its hidden and structural facets (Harris, 1995; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tyson, 1998).

Needless to say, most individuals do not discuss the topic of racism at all (Fine, Powell, Weis, & Mun Wong, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Sleeter, 1996). They ignore it because they believe the topic is too unpleasant (Anzaldúa, 1990), because they feel that racism is a thing of the past (Bell, 1995b), because they do not see themselves as “raced” individuals (Fine et al., 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Haney López, 1995a, 1995b), or because they feel that the race problem is not theirs to solve (Tatum, 1997). Others feel that because they, as individuals, do not hold racist beliefs, then the topic is somewhat external and impertinent in their daily lives (Frankenberg, 1993). In all of these cases, such beliefs—individually and collectively—domesticate and minimize the role of race and racism in the larger social order.

TOWARD A CRITICAL RACE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

The fact of the matter is that racism is alive and well in this country and has never waned despite the passage of federal and state mandates that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race (Bell, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1995d; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1997; Matsuda, 1996; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). The only difference between racism today and of the past is that modern-day racism is more subtle, invisible, and insidious. Popular beliefs such as color blindness and equal opportunity have only served to drive racism underground, making it increasingly difficult for people of color to name their reality (Parker et al., 1999).

Racism now requires tangible proof of its existence: hate crimes, lynching, hate speech, burning crosses, or other symbolic or physical assault (Matsuda et al., 1993; Williams, 1995b). It requires a perpetrator—an evildoer who discriminates against others on the basis of skin color or racial makeup—or other tangible evidence of conflict, discrimination, or bias. Without this external proof, racism is difficult to affirm, particularly in a court of law (Matsuda et al., 1993).

Unfortunately, racism is as powerful today as it was in the past; it has merely assumed a normality, and thus an invisibility, in our daily lives. In other words, “Time has made past racial practices and assumptions invisible to modern eyes” (Lazos Vargas, in press). We often fail to recognize racism because we do not see it beyond its most blatant manifestations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). By necessitating tangible documentation of its existence, legal and juridical apparatuses have, in effect, dealt with racism’s most obvious forms but have perpetuated its existence at deeper and more invisible levels.

In addition, racism has now been turned on its head, as allegations of reverse racism and calls for equal protection are increasingly used by Whites to prove discrimination or racial harm against them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This is particularly true in affirmative action cases (*Hopwood v. Texas*, 1996; *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 1978), where Whites have sued their organizations using the same legal statutes designed to protect African Americans and other marginalized groups (Parker, in press; Taylor, 1999). Indeed, racism has taken on a new twist, as Whites reclaim their positionality and power in society by using the courts as their vehicle. The staying power of case law only institutionalizes the current power relationships between Whites and non-Whites while protecting the material and symbolic property interest of White individuals (Harris, 1995).

In response to these growing concerns, a new area of legal scholarship known as CRT has emerged to analyze the pervasiveness of racism in society (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, 1996; Matsuda et al., 1993; Valdes et al., 2002; Williams, 1995b). As an outgrowth of the Civil Rights movement and the Critical Legal Studies movement, CRT’s premise is to critically interrogate how the law reproduces, reifies, and normalizes racism in society. Rather than subscribe to the belief that racism is an abnormal or unusual concept, critical race theorists begin with the premise that racism is a normal and endemic component of our social fabric (see also Banks, 1993; Collins, 1991; Gordon, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tatum, 1997; Tyson, 1998). CRT scholars suggest that the reason why society fails to see racism is because it is such a common/everyday experience that it is often taken for

granted. In other words, racism is part of our everyday reality. It is part of our social fabric and embedded in our organizations, practices, and structures (Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tyson, 1998)—it is the usual way “society does business” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7).

Because it is so ordinary, we often fail to see how it functions and shapes our institutions, relationships, and ways of thinking. By unmasking the hidden faces of racism, CRT aims to expose and unveil White privilege “in its various permutations” (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 12) and reveal a social order that is highly stratified and segmented along racial lines. It is hoped that such an unveiling will reveal the simple fact that racism is a permanent fixture in the American political, legal, and social spectrum (Bell, 1995b; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

A second tenet of CRT is “Interest Convergence” (Bell, 1995a), or the belief that Whites will tolerate and advance the interests of people of color only when they promote the self-interests of Whites. Consider, for example, the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. Derrick Bell (1995a) suggested that the Supreme Court decided in favor of desegregation, not because of the historical plight and social conditions of people of color, but because the United States needed to soften its stance on racism to politically appease its ally countries in the third world during the cold war. In addition, Bell documented how the courts were especially sympathetic to White people’s fear of yet another potential uprising by African Americans. Bell’s research suggests that something dramatic needed to be done on a large scale to prevent the possible boiling-over of African Americans in the United States and the potential damage such an uprising could cause for White individuals. In effect, *Brown v. Board of Education* was passed simply because the material interests of Whites converged with the civil rights interests of African Americans at this particular point in time (Bell, 1995a; see also Harris, 1995). Such a convergence not only ensures that racism always remains firmly in place but that social progress advances at the pace that White people determine is reasonable and judicious (Bell, 1995a).

The third aspect of CRT is the privileging of stories and counterstories (Delgado, 1995b, 1995c)—particularly the stories that are told by people of color. CRT scholars believe there are two differing accounts of reality: the dominant reality that “looks ordinary and natural” (Delgado, 1995a, p. xiv) to most individuals, and a racial reality (Bell, 1995b) that has been filtered out, suppressed, and censored. The counterstories of people of color—such as the counterstory of the Harlem riots—are those stories that are not told, stories that are consciously and/or unconsciously ignored or downplayed because

they do not fit socially acceptable notions of truth. By highlighting these subjugated accounts, CRT hopes to demystify the notion of a racially neutral society and tell another story of a highly racialized social order: a story where social institutions and practices serve the interest of White individuals.

Taken holistically, CRT posits that beliefs in neutrality, democracy, objectivity, and equality “are not just unattainable ideals, they are harmful fictions that obscure the normative supremacy of whiteness in American law and society” (Valdes et al., 2002, p. 3). Notwithstanding, White Americans continue to believe in these ideals, because a racial reality is, perhaps, too difficult to digest. For example, if I were to argue that what we study within the politics of education is entirely racist, most scholars in the field—conservative and liberal alike—would be greatly offended, finding such statements preposterous and absurd. Although some would agree there might be certain institutional practices (such as power) that limit the political participation of nonmainstream groups, or perhaps a handful of truly racist individuals whose values and beliefs create policies that negatively affect people of color, most of us would believe that our knowledge base is not largely affected by racism.

To the contrary, most of us would tend to believe that what we study actually highlights the processes by which people of color are marginalized on a daily basis and how they can challenge and change the political spectrum through voting, grassroots organizing, mass mobilization, and the election of minority officials and representatives. In other words, the belief that the politics of education actively supports a racist agenda does not fit our prevailing and espoused beliefs about the nature of the field.

The role of CRT is to highlight the fact that such beliefs only serve to maintain racism in place—relegating racism to overt/blatant and unmistakable acts of hatred, as opposed to highlighting the ways in which our beliefs, practices, knowledge, and apparatuses reproduce a system of racial hierarchy and social inequality. Rarely do we question our own values and knowledge base and how those beliefs emerge from—and help sustain—the notion of a racially neutral and democratic social order that works for all people. In other words, within the field, we have a tendency to think that social problems (such as racism) will be resolved if more people get involved in the political arena and “do something” about it. The belief in democracy and “justice for all” is protected—as is the belief that the vehicles to ascertain social justice are racially neutral. It is a cheery and simplistic take on how racism actually functions in society, as well as a naïve understanding how it can be resolved and remedied.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, CRT has played an important role in both legal and educational circles and has expanded well beyond its origins in the legal arena (see also Delgado Bernal, 2002; Duncan, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lewis, 2001; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Parker et al., 1999; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002; Tate, 1997; Taylor, 1999; Villalpando, in press; Villalpando & Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Despite this proliferation, CRT has yet to make significant inroads into other important areas of study such as educational administration, politics of education, policy studies, and political science. As a result, important discussions surrounding the permanence of racism remain largely absent in these particular fields. This absence is particularly crucial because these areas collectively argue that social and racial progress cannot only be advanced but can be overcome and remedied through collective good will, reform-oriented visions, and strategic policies. CRT introduces the fact that racial progress cannot be made by politics or policy alone—because racism cannot be remedied without substantially recognizing and altering White privilege.

Earlier in this discussion, I made reference to a story of conflict and how Schattschneider failed to think about race, racism, and the historical treatment of people of color in his analysis. I believe Schattschneider's work is, in many ways, representative of the field as a whole. Many times, we miss opportunities to identify and name racism, largely because we do not see it in the work we do and/or because our respective lenses are not attuned to recognizing it in our daily lives. CRT provides us with a healthy reminder that racism is alive and well in this country and functions at a level that is often invisible to most individuals. It reminds us that the only way we will make advances in dealing with the problem of racism is if we take the time to see and understand how it operates, recognize it within ourselves, highlight it within our field, and take brave steps to do something about it. Indeed, it reminds us that we have a long way to go to address the intractable problem of race in this society.

As scholars who prepare future educational leaders, we cannot continue to marginalize and/or trivialize issues of race and racism within the larger discourse of educational leadership and policy (Larson, 1997; Parker & Shapiro, 1992; Young & Laible, 2000). Issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other areas of difference—including their intersections—must take a central role in our knowledge base and practices, so that the “important stuff” in educational leadership is not solely rooted in technical knowledge of

leadership and organizational theory but rests in the nuances of creating schools that truly work for all children, families, and members of the school community. Perhaps the time has come to take the lessons of CRT to heart and begin the process of naming and dismantling racism within our ranks as well as in the work we do.

NOTES

1. This add-on itself is a racist practice. Not only is the academic terrain of faculty of color often limited to special topics involving diversity, but this type of add-on approach only serves to marginalize race as something that is not central to the curriculum in educational leadership.

2. See also the *Best of Simple* (1990) stories by Langston Hughes, which brilliantly detail the essence, meaning, and character of African American life in postwar Harlem. Through stories and anecdotes—which vacillate from the strikingly painful to the hilariously funny—Hughes delivers a powerful narrative of race relations, police brutality, love, and vice, never forgetting the social context in which life unfolds.

3. It should be noted that the collective anger and frustration of African Americans did not exist outside of hope, optimism, and faith in social change. In fact, McCartney (1992) argued that these beliefs are not mutually exclusive, because social conditions give rise to anger which results in action and mobilization. Unfortunately, many of the actions taken by African Americans have historically been met with resistance by White Americans.

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