Forging community in race and class: critical race theory and the quest for social justice in education

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Among the communities of critical race theorists and its detractors in education, there is an apparent rift as to what theoretical construct best contributes to the social justice project in education. Conferences and meetings have served as quasi-battle grounds for theorists, activists and scholars to go back and forth about what theoretical construct has the greatest bearing on educational praxis. Debate notwithstanding, the following document argues critical race theory (CRT hereafter) as a viable theoretical construct to address issues of social justice in education. In so doing, the following document couches the discussion in three tasks. The first is to identify the contributions of CRT in education. Second, the document argues for a closer read of the theoretical construct and its subsequent application. The concluding task will be an example of how the points of contention and compliance can be located through an example (in this case narrative) of a school with a social justice agenda at its center. As Yamamoto suggests, the occupation of the socially conscious scholar is to participate in the activities that challenge hegemony at both the grassroots and intellectual levels. From this we can engage CRT in education with a concerted effort to change our present realities.

Social justice, CRT, critical race praxis, and White supremacy: working definitions

For the purposes of this document, definitions in this section should be considered 'working' descriptions in that they are not exhaustive of the literature on social justice, CRT, racialization and White supremacy. Operating as a subset of the larger body of literature, the following section provides a base of understanding from which to operate.

Beginning with social justice, a definition is borrowed from Maxine Greene in that the project in education includes teaching:

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> ... for enhanced perception and imaginative explorations, for the recognition of social wrongs, of sufferings, of pestilences wherever and whenever they arise ... it is to teach so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places, so that they may become healers and change their worlds. (Greene, cited in Ayers *et al.*, 1998, p. xiv)

In essence the process becomes to engage young people (in this case) to answer the question 'what is powerful, important and ours?' Throughout this process those who work with young people in the capacity of educator, community organizer, social service provider or academic come to embrace numerous theoretical concepts and constructs to explain the varied realities in which they operate. Where most theories in this concept would be considered 'grounded theory' in that they are informed by the situations in which we work, CRT contributes to such knowledge in the valuing of daily experiences with racism as necessary qualitative data.

In its most explicit definition of its operation in education, Gloria Ladson-Billings uses CRT to name and highlight the function of White supremacy through five tenets. Essentially, the CRT project in education becomes the attempt to:

1. Name and discuss the pervasive, daily reality of racism in US society which serves to disadvantage people of color.
2. Expose and deconstruct seemingly 'colorblind' or 'race neutral' policies and practices which entrench the disparate treatment of people of non-White persons.
3. Legitimize and promote the voices and narrative of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them.
4. Revisit civil rights law and liberalism to address their inability to dismantle and expunge discriminatory socio-political relationships.
5. Change and improve challenges to race neutral and multicultural movements in education which have made White student behavior the norm (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Central to the following account, the third tenet operates as a means by which to challenge detractors of CRT and legitimize the importance of working towards social justice in communities of color. In response to the adversarial relationship that many communities of color have experienced with urban school systems, a counter story is needed to identify the desire for said communities for quality education despite mainstream accounts that depict communities of color as 'anti-school' or 'anti-intellectual'. Such counter stories become the foundation by which to pose alternatives to education systems that operate to further marginalize communities of color. Borrowing from the work of Solorzano and Yosso (2002), a counter story asks readers to 'suspend judgement, listen for the story's points, test them against (their) own version of reality (however conceived), and use the counter story as a theoretical conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical case study' (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23).

Acknowledging similar experiences in the international scope of imperialism and domination, CRT positions itself on the continuum of scholars who have unambiguously named the nature of oppression in US education (see Anderson, 1988; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Mills, 1997; Woodson, 2000; Watkins, 2001).

Instead of separating the authors due to method or discipline, CRT invokes a call to an interdisciplinary approach in naming the function of educational domination. Accounts in the humanities, social sciences (education included), and legal scholarship converge in CRT to identify the structures by which we understand the forces that work in opposition to the social justice project in education.

Again, CRT recognizes the complexity of racial dynamics. Such intricacy requires the ability to speak across numerous boundaries to highlight common points of interest that not only seek to eliminate White supremacy, but on the most practical level engage communities in building coalitions. Eric Yamamoto, by encouraging a critical race praxis, promotes increased attention to a critical rethinking of what race is, how civil rights claims may be both empowering and debilitating and whether legal process and its alternatives foster or impede racial healing (Yamamoto, 1998, p. 129)

The process of developing praxis (theory plus practice) becomes an inclusive strategy aimed at facilitating an understanding between groups of color of the systemic structures that impede development and justice. In education this can operate at numerous levels where students and parents may experience levels of discrimination based on language, socioeconomic status, or stereotype. Where a more specific example will be discussed in later sections, the understanding of White supremacy as a structural phenomenon informs our work in developing proactive stances in addressing needs and concerns of communities of color. The process is useful in education because it challenges scholars to 'spend less time on abstract theorizing and more time on actual community based anti-subordination practice' (Yamamoto, 1997, p. 873). Referenced by Dixson and Rousseau (2005), CRT 'mandates that social activism be a part of any CRT project' (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005, p. 12). In the following section we are introduced to the author's attempt at such an endeavor.

Although highly debated in academic circles on the viability of its function, a working definition of White supremacy provides a space from which to develop a concentrated understanding of CRT. In so doing, this account borrows a definition of White supremacy from Frances Lee Ansley (2003), in recognizing it as:

> A political, economic and cultural system in which Whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of White dominance and non-White subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley, cited in Mills, 2003, p.179)

Where many would argue this to be a de facto summation of public schooling in the US, others have critiqued it as too narrow a concept to encapsulate the complexities of social relationships. Despite such critique, CRT scholars would add that this concept is of critical importance as we investigate what shape the project of social justice will take, depending on the situation.

The following account will also refer to situations as 'racialized'. Borrowing from Bonilla-Silva's (1996) concept of racialized social systems, it refers to 'societies in

which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races' (Bonilla-Silva, 1996, p. 469). A concrete example would be the more fluid concepts of race throughout Central America, the Carribean and South America. In opposition to overt racist acts, there is a subtle social hierarchy based on 'social estimations' (e.g., one group 'looking better' or 'being smarter' than another based on physical attributes or family lineage). Where many Latino/a households watch novellas, many of the main characters remain European in appearance. Darker-skinned characters are still given roles as troublemakers, scarlets, or evildoers. As the common denominator remains language, hierarchy is actualized in roles assigned to certain groups. Such subtleties become important in later sections of the text due to the interplay of race and class analysis.

Although rarely equated with CRT in education, parallels can be made with much of socialist critique in education in its analysis of power and domination. William Watkins, in his analysis of White rule of African-American education from 1865 to 1954, points to the earlier colonial period in discussion of how education was 'designed to control, pacify, and socialize subject people' (Watkins, 2001, p. 1). In connecting the education of African-Americans to state politics and the labor market, Watkins engages meticulous analysis of the structure and function of power. In calling for a 'critical theory of racism that can grapple with a radical remaking of democracy in the age of a globalized post-industrial economy', Darder and Torres place a call to engage social justice with an understanding of the totalizing system of capitalism (Darder & Torres, 2003, p. 260). In breaking the hegemonic hold of standards-based education and its devaluing of students of color, the remainder of the document seeks synergy between the two camps in regards to what it will take to 'critically' engage education for those concerned with social justice.

Ideological connections: CRT's response to its detractors

Offering a critique of CRT, Darder and Torres (2003) are correct in that CRT is a theory critical of the common assumptions placed within the context of race. To make the point more salient, CRT *should be* discussed as a critical theory of race and racism. The critique of Darder and Torres in this sense is more semantic in nature in that they make the point that CRT scholars do not make the necessary distinction between 'race' and 'racism.' However, they are correct in that

> ... dramatic national and international changes, both economic and political, have created conditions which, on the one hand, racialized structures, processes and representations are more intricate and elusive, yet, on the other hand, the historically entrenched inequities persist. (Darder & Torres, 2003, p. 245).

Operating as a theory critical of race and racism, the push becomes for CRT scholars to highlight the dynamic, but consistently oppressive nature of racism over the last 500 years in the western hemisphere. Darder and Torres are correct in that race is not a monolithic concept that encapsulates every experience of people of color. It is

instead a construct that has been historically utilized to justify political, economic, and social inequality. Because it is socially constructed, race can have multiple meanings based on site-specific experiences and relationships to structures of power (i.e., state sanctioned education). Race as a concept has no biological foundation. However, it would be a critical mistake to deny the lived realities of racism in daily life.

In reference to capitalism, Darder and Torres are also correct in defining capitalism as a 'totalizing system of social relations' (2003, p. 247). The concept of White supremacy in CRT should be understood in the same light. Moreover, the concept should 'play the same roll in CRT that "capitalism" does in class society and "patriarchy" respectively play in Marxist and feminist political theory' (Mills, 2003, p. 182). Again, in its totalizing method, we would be remiss to deny the impact race has on a macro-construct like capitalism. To concur, capitalism does act as a homogenizing force instead of a diversifying one. Right-wing think tanks in the US like the American Civil-Rights Institute, The Center for Equal Opportunity, The Center for Individual Rights and the Hoover Institute make this clear in their recent co-option of civil rights language to influence public policy in education (i.e., Proposition 209 in California, Initiative 200 in Washington state, Proposition 203 in Arizona, etc). The argument has shifted to one that downplays the significance of race for language supporting economic concerns that will supposedly supercede or solve the social concerns of the present day. In the eyes of the conservative right in the US, affirmative action policies have become plans of 'racial preference,' and violations of civil rights. The domestic and global influence of the Right shape their viewpoints by 'rearticulating the Civil Rights legacy's moderate agenda of "rights" and opportunities in an ideology of individualism and meritocracy' (Winant, 2001, p. 151). Where Ward Connerly's (chairman of the American Civil Rights Institute) quote 'race has no place in American life or law' (www.acri.org) is viewed as questionable in reference to CRT ideology, it has become the Right's new lingua franca.

Conceptualized as a response to the critical legal studies (CLS hereafter) movement of the 1970s, CRT made the explicit point that class was too narrow a concept to explain the detrimental effects of hegemony in the US. As one of the common interests of CRT as stated by Crenshaw *et al.* (1995), the theory in its legal inception sought to;

> ... understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America and ... to examine the relationship between the social structure and professed ideals such as 'the rule of law' and equal protection (Crenshaw *et al.*, 1995, p. 1)

With legal theory at its center, CRT critiqued liberalism and its reliance on systemic structures to address ills of the society at large. Its response to CLS came in the form of a critique of class as the dominant factor in addressing issues of inequality. Where CRT highlights the centrality of race, it should not perform such a task without substantive class analysis. Discussed in future sections, there are a number of CRT scholars who have initiated the process in education (see Lopez, 2003; Yosso, 2002; Torres, 1998).

The need for a closer read of CRT

Where the shortcomings of CRT are important to note in regards to class, it becomes equally important to discuss common misinterpretations of CRT. Reducing the construct to identity politics is an improper reading of the theoretical construct. Some argue the theory has used the construct of race:

> ... as central category of analysis for interpreting the social conditions of inequality and marginalization. In turn, this literature has reinforced a racialized politics of identity and representation with its problematic emphasis on 'racial' identity as the overwhelming impulse for political action. (Darder & Torres, 2003, p. 246)

This interpretation is shortsighted for several reasons. First, it would be thoughtless not to place the realities of class discrimination as critical to any discourse on hegemony. However, it would also be incorrect to devalue the relationship between race and class in education. In this instance, race and class become a 'chicken and egg' argument as to which one is deemed most significant in analyzing and addressing issues of inequality. Both race and class are can be central to analysis of hegemony. CRT recognizes that one should not go without the other. It continues to function as a critical theory of racism. The use of the term 'race' in the title CRT is misinterpreted. It is not steeped in the narrow concept of 'race' as a monolith encapsulating the entirety of experiences of people of color. Instead, CRT recognizes in situations where class is argued to be the central theme, it would be just as damaging to exclude race and vice versa. The purpose in this instance is not for CRT to bemoan the issue of being considered secondary to class analysis. Instead, CRT is making the point to name the structural function of racism as relevant and significant, in addition to class. For education, CRT is making the attempt to confront White supremacy in the form of the power of Whites in the school system and the resources that the majority wealthy White districts have and refuse to relinquish (e.g., school funding in the US based on property taxes).

Where CRT agrees capitalism to be a 'totalizing' system, we should also consider White supremacy in the same instance. A prominent example would be the current 108th Senate of the US. CRT would suggest that it is not coincidence that 98 of the current 100 members are White. Instead, it is reflective of a totalizing system that has people of color on the margins in the law making process. Where socialist critique would couple members of the Senate as members of the ruling class, a CRT critique would remind us that this ruling class continues to be White, reflecting the views and values of a ruling elite. Surely there are those individual persons of color with conservative viewpoints that live affluently in their support of the status quo. There are even those that are chosen to act in leadership capacities for the ruling class. Yet, these persons are required to perform duties conducive to the prescribed functions of the state. Despite their conservative viewpoints, they remain disposable employees of the ruling class. While those who invoke a class analysis in reference to the aforementioned as 'selling out,' one should understand such actions as supporting White supremacy. Their actions as people of color in serving the interests of the conservative right reifies current racialized power structures in that those who control the resources

and social status to which they emulate remain White. Even in spaces where this may be debatable (Mexico, Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, etc), one need must be reminded of Bonilla-Silva's (1996) point that racism, in addition to overt behaviors, can be 'subtle, indirect, or fluid' (Bonilla-Silva, 1996, p. 468).

Returning to a critique of capitalism, critics of CRT are incorrect in stating that CRT has not given the necessary credence to the severity of capitalism. Conversely, CRT in legal scholarship has performed this task in reference to Cheryl Harris's 'Whiteness as property'. Highlighting the synonymous development of racism and economics in creating the social, economic, and political systems in the US, Harris responds to critics of her interpretation of property interests.

> Because the law recognized and protected expectations grounded in White privilege (albeit not explicitly in all instances), these expectations became tantamount to property that could not permissibly be intruded upon without consent. As the law explicitly ratified those expectations in continued privilege or extended ongoing protection to those illegitimate expectations by failing to expose or to disturb them radically, the dominant and subordinate positions within the racial hierarchy were reified in law. (Harris, cited in Crenshaw *et al.*, 1995, p. 281)

Here the argument encapsulates the economic and social order as centered in racial ideology. 'Property' in Harris' sense operates on material and social levels, expressed in common assumptions on race. Contrary to Darder and Torres's point on CRT as divorcing itself from the 'realities of class struggle', it makes room for the realities of class while discussing them in the context of what race meant historically and what it has come to mean in contemporary analysis (Darder & Torres, 2003, p. 248). Because racial and ethnic groups can be approved and discarded over time by the ruling class, it remains critical to name those who make the decisions as to who are accepted and rejected. Again, it is not by happenstance that this group remains White. In order to engage the social justice project in education, it is of critical importance to name said 'realities' in the effort to change them.

CRT recognizes the problematic nature of the Black and White binary in discussions of race. Additionally, its interdisciplinary approach it welcomes discussions of class in naming and working to end oppression. In so doing, as a theoretical construct it has evolved into Lat crit, Asian-American crit and critical race feminism to recognize the fluid nature of oppression and what it can mean to particular groups. Hayman (1995) makes the point salient in that 'CRT is complex, nuanced and dynamic and is in constant dialogue with other contemporary movements' (Hayman, 1995, p. 62). In developing a series of tenets of CRT, Hayman's second point is critical in that critical race theorists 'reject the contention that texts and practices have objective, neutral meanings and insist instead on their relentless deconstruction and perhaps reconstruction' (p. 70). The subtleties at play in such a statement are critical. On a practical level, the application of CRT should not be a space where those employed in the academy continuously complain about the 'troubles of the world'.

Instead, it should be understood that a main component in developing praxis includes a recognition and understanding of the world in which you live. Experiential knowledge is critical in providing the necessary foundation upon which to build the

necessary strategies to address the issues at hand. Calmore (1992), in recognizing the importance of research and activism, locates the necessity of synergy between the paradigms:

> While activist practice must be directed toward transforming the concrete situations that give rise to oppression, it is also valuable for intellectuals to intervene critically in confronting the culture of domination and the system and process of laws that support and maintain it. ... CRT recognizes that revolutionizing a culture begins with the radical assessment of it. (Calmore, 1992, p. 4)

Where not as overt, one can visualize the subtle yet totalizing function of racism. The stereotype of the group of old White men convening in clandestine meetings plotting the demise of people of color is futile. Racism, like capitalism, is an accepted structural phenomenon centered in maintaining the status quo. It is not, and never has been, the result of individual bigotry it is often reduced to. Instead of race as a category, racism (i.e., White supremacy) should be understood as a set of systemic structures that maintain a racial ruling elite as demonstrated through enforcement of policies and laws that govern the land. One need only investigate public policy and the damaging affects it has on communities of color. Where language is less overt than edicts of the Jim Crow South, the de jure interpretations of policy remain racialized. Take for example a current loitering ordinance in an urban metropolis. The policy states any group of three or more people can be considered a gang if one of the persons is a 'known gang member'. If the previous is true, the entire party can be detained for questioning. CRT would require us to engage an empirical inquiry of the ordinance. A critical question to be considered would be to investigate the demographics (race, gender, ethnicity, place of residence, etc) of those detained in reference to the policy. Currently, conservatives in the state of California have suggested a 'racial privacy initiative' that would make access to such information illegal. If we are unable to access said data, how would we discern if law enforcement is enforcing the policy fairly? Would this green light the police force to make random stops on any group of three of more people? What constitutes a 'known gang member'?

Educational policy should be viewed in the same light. While many conservative groups are lauding the 2001 US federal initiative 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB hereafter), it has been nightmarish for other school districts. A CRT analysis of the policy would require research on NCLB's impact on communities of color in urban areas (most of which are low income). Currently the greatest pressure is placed on the lowest performing schools to increase student outcomes (e.g., test performance). What is not discussed, is how the Federal Government plans to support the lowest performing schools to improve student outcomes. Improvement is disguised with the language of choice, in that parents whose children attend a local underperforming school can transfer their child to a school that is at or above grade level. The undercurrent removed from the conversation is that many of the parents who qualify for such transfers are unable to send their children to the higher performing school due to population concerns (most schools performing at or above grade level in urban districts are at or above capacity). While language continues to be neutral, the

enforcement becomes racialized in urban areas when the schools that are placed on the 'watch list' for poor performance predominantly serve students of color. Again, it is correct that those with a socialist critique of NCLB are correct in that these students of color will also reside in predominantly 'low-income' areas. However, we would be negligent not to include the policy's racial impact.

Still, the politics of identity are viewed as 'grossly inept and unsuited for building and sustaining collective political movements for social justice and economic democracy' (Darder & Torres, 2003, p. 248). This statement requires a bit of unpacking. To critique CRT simply as 'identity politics' ignores the necessity of narrative in developing coalitions across racial and class boundaries. Education provides and excellent example in that many African-American and Latino/a communities in the US are plagued with under-resourced schools. Although the specifics of each school are nuanced, it still sheds light on the master narrative of White supremacy. Almaguer's (1998) point remains relevant in his discussion of racism in California in that race relations:

> Reverberated along a number of racial fault lines, they did not assume a simple binary form or erupt along on principal fault. The allocation of 'group position' along these social strata was the outcome of both cultural and material considerations. (Almaguer, cited in Delgado & Stefancic, 1998, p. 166)

Detractors of CRT state the socialist project in education calls for readers to address 'the material conditions under which students must achieve' (Darder & Torres, 2003, p. 251). Such material conditions contain the 'structure of society and the economic and political limitations' (p. 251). They remain correct in relation to education in that 'academic performance is determined by a interplay of complex social process' (p. 253). CRT scholarship would not disagree. Nevertheless, these material conditions are not the creation of capitalism alone. Charles Mills (2003), in his discussion of class and race, forges the significance of White Supremacy, stating that it:

> ... needs to be taken as a theoretical object in its own right—a global social system comparable in current significance ... to Marx's class society and feminist thinkers' patriarchy. If philosophy is about understanding the human condition, then it needs to understand the condition of humans as shaped and molded by these systems into capitalists and workers, men and women, whites and nonwhites. (Mills, 2003, p.178)

If we take such a stance on education, it becomes critical to recognize the potential systemic damage of educational policy. Colorblind policies may have no de jure mention of race (or class) but are interpreted to disparately affect communities of color. It is not to deny that issues of class are at play. However, the inclusion of racism continues to inform our work on the discrete, yet damaging effects of White supremacy. Instead of class analysis serving as the point of solidarity, a focus on White privilege is just as likely to create solidarity between workers (Whites included) across race. Where those who side with socialist critique would argue that the previous promotes an identity politic, I would argue the contrary. Whites should be included in the focus on White privilege in that the responsibility in educating other Whites

rests heavily with them. Their experiential knowledge of the construct enables them to unpack the intricate and subtle functions of White privilege and its various rationales. They should not be excluded from the larger context of class struggle because such recognition is integral in any analysis of racialized social systems. Again, we are compelled to include Bonilla-Silva's assertion that:

> ... the systemic salience of class in relation to race increases when the economic, political and social distance between races decreases substantially. Yet this broad argument generates at least one warning: The narrowing of within-class differences between racial actors usually causes more rather hat less racial conflict, at least in the short run, as the competition for resources increases ... even when class-based conflict becomes more salient in a social order, the racial component survives until the races' life chances are equalized and the mechanisms and social practices that produce those differences are eliminated. (Bonilla-Silva, 1996, p. 471)

It is shortsighted of us not to recognize the history of racism in the worker's movement in the US. Countless communities of color continue to be 'spoken for' by well-meaning Whites claiming to 'understand' the struggles of communities of color. In response, CRT maintains that the communities of color in question remain and should be understood as the resident experts on their conditions. Any organizing effort that does not acknowledge and develop praxis on this level is doomed for failure.

Nevertheless, a 'critical theory of racism represents a bold and forthright challenge to common-sense notions of "race"' (Darder & Torres, 2003, p. 259). However, it is incorrect to state that CRT makes it 'nearly impossible to dismantle the external material structure of domination that sustain racialized inequalities in schools and the larger society' (p. 259). CRT would argue that while material structures are a concern, praxis (theory plus practice) provides tangible examples in addressing issues of White supremacy.

Critics of CRT seek a 'critical language and conceptual apparatus that makes racism the central category of analysis in our understanding of racialized inequality' (Darder & Torres, 2003, p. 261). It is the understanding by scholars in CRT that the theoretical construct has been nothing short of this summation. Vital to this misinterpretation is the semantics of referencing CRT as a critique solely of 'race'. In no CRT literature is there a claim to the unanimity of race. The critique has and continues to be one of the functions of White supremacy and the complexities of race. CRT recognizes the Black/White racial binary as useless in describing the conditions of people of color in the US. In fact, a parallel understanding can be located in the introduction of Crenshaw *et al.* CRT, from its inception:

> ... understands that racial power is produced by and experienced within numerous vectors of social life. CRT recognizes too, that political interventions which overlook the multiple ways in which people of color are situated (and restricted) as communities, sub-communities, and individuals will do little to promote effective resistance to, and counter mobilization against, today's newly empowered right. (Crenshaw *et al.*, 1995, p. xxxii)

In these parallel constructs is the potential for synergy. As the conservative Right in the US continues to co-opt the language of the civil rights movement, it would

behoove us in education to engage proactive strategies in securing the ability to instill change across educational, political, economic and social communities.

Possible unions: counter-story, praxis and the quest for social justice in education

Through counter story we are able to discover the relationships between nuanced experience, individual responses and macro-policy. Coupled with praxis, the social justice project in education becomes a tangible exercise as experiences are utilized to inform our theories. By placing CRT and socialist critique on the ground, educators, activists, academics, and organizers are challenged to engage the often messy, muddled and conflicting issues of race and racism.

Yamamoto (1998) argues for a critical race praxis that pays 'enhanced attention to theory translation and deeper engagement with ·frontline action' while providing 'increased attention to a critical rethinking of what race is' (p. 129). The challenge posed by Darder and Torres to make racism a central category in our understanding of inequality becomes integral to our process. Although Yamomoto's example is an account of combining the struggles of two communities of color from a legal standpoint, the following section attempts to apply his theoretical construct to an example in education.

As an educator who tries to forge tangible relationships between theory and practice, I have found myself engaging three specific fronts: community organizations, urban public secondary schools, and the academy. Throughout the process I have been supported and debated as to what will 'work' in the three spaces in addressing issues of race and racism. Each space presents unique challenges, but can be intimately connected in developing critical race praxis. Returning to the aforementioned tenets of Ladson-Billings, naming the 'pervasive, daily reality of racism in US society' calls for an approach that is immersed in the stories and processes by which communities confront the establishment. By developing a counter story through my current work, the hope is to contribute to the existing examples of the social justice project in education.

Currently I am a member of a design team for a high school scheduled to open in the Fall of 2005, in a major urban city in the midwest region of the US. This particular city is severely segregated due to various racial tensions and historical municipal policies that have prevented certain communities of color (African-American and Latino/a in this account) from living in integrated spaces. In terms of schooling, it has resulted in a separate and unequal system of public education. Many of the schools located in African-American and Latino/a neighborhoods are grossly under-resourced, resulting in a series of concerns (i.e., poor teacher–student relationships, poor school–community relationships, low student performance, low student engagement, high student mobility rates, increasing drop-out rates, etc). The coupling of class and race are explicit in that over 85% of students served in public schools in this city are African-American and Latino/a while 65% of this population would be categorized as 'low income'. CRT and class analysis are coupled in that one cannot

be present without the other in recognizing the political, social, and economic factors that influence inequality.

In reference to the current plight of urban public education, the aforementioned account is typical of many urban areas in the US. This particular situation becomes unique in that the following narrative is of two communities' attempt to forge meaningful relationships through the development of a high school. Their struggle serves as counter story aimed at developing community across racial groups in the struggle for social justice in education.

It would be incorrect in stating that African-Americans and Latino/as in this city have been historically pitted against each other. Despite tensions between both groups, there are instances where both communities have worked in concert to address political, housing, and educational concerns. However, tensions do flare in the space between communities as lines of communication are frequently strained due to language barriers, residential segregation and general unfamiliarity with each other's culture. In developing critical race praxis, both communities (one Mexican/ Mexican-American, the other African-American) have made the conscious attempt to develop a college preparatory community school, serving both neighborhoods.

The story is mired in issues of race and class. First, this major city was in a major reform effort to 'revitalize the city's ailing schools'. What was not mentioned, however, was that the majority of these funds (distributed in the years 1995–2000) for secondary schools went to selective-enrollment schools for high achieving students. As selective enrollment schools were established throughout the city, most of the students were from families that would be categorized as 'middle class'. As low-income students are not present in the selective enrollment schools, a socialist critique is appropriate in recognizing the prevalence of class.

In addition, selective enrollment schools require students have to have a high composite scores upon graduation from grade school to take the admissions test for admission to selective enrollment high schools. At this juncture CRT is valuable in the analysis of system-wide racial dynamics of selective enrollment schools in addition to previously discussed class components. Despite the system's 85% African-American and Latino/a population, the majority of White students remaining in public schools are found in the selective enrollment high schools. Currently the city in question has eight selective enrollment schools out of an existing 70 high schools. All selective enrollment schools boast high college acceptance rates, active parent support networks, and high rates of teacher efficacy. Few students come from families in the 'low-income' bracket and are provided the best teachers and academic programs the system has to offer. While other high schools may have problems purchasing books and managing payroll, many of the selective enrollment schools have early college enrollment courses and faculty members with doctorate degrees.

During the same reform effort, the previously mentioned Mexican-American neighborhood was promised a non-selective enrollment, community high school to serve its students. Students would not be required to take a test for admissions and the only qualifications for attending the high school was graduation from 8th grade and residence in the neighborhoods' residential borders. To provide a show of

confidence to the community, land was purchased in 1998 on which to build the high school. The central education office, along with the city's mayor, boasted the successes of the city's reform efforts. Unmentioned in popular media outlets was the neighborhoods' chronic school overcrowding and lack of resources. Currently one public high school is in the neighborhood. Because there are over 7500 high school aged students in the area, it is impossible for many students to attend their neighborhood public school. In addition to the 7500 high school students in the Mexican-American neighborhood, another 3500 African-American high school aged students live in the neighboring community. Because the neighborhood high school is bursting at the seems with a population at nearly 2200 students to serve two communities, many young people in the neighborhood have to travel considerable distances to attend other high schools with admissions slots. Again the realities of CRT and socialist critique are present in that both communities, in addition to lack of resources, are racialized, thusly receiving inadequate attention to their educational needs. They are not excluded from educational resources solely on issues of class. Instead, they are excluded because they are poor and of color.

As the reform effort progressed, two selective enrollment high schools were built and another three were scheduled to open by the fall of 2002. When members from the Mexican-American community questioned central office on the building of their high school, they were told that the funds were spent despite the city's land purchase. Appalled and disappointed, members of the Mexican-American community began to organize among themselves. The conversations were centered in the community holding the city accountable for its inability to grant the community their high school. Community meetings, receiving input from, block clubs, community development organizations, church groups, and parent organizations within schools resulted in a drastic, yet-effective form of protest to draw attention to central office's impropriety.

The meeting of the minds resulted in a hunger strike. For 19 days beginning on 13 May 2001 a group of 14 students, parents, grandparents and concerned community members went without food, protesting the denial of their high school. The hunger strike drew national attention, forcing the city to answer to the concerns of the community. After weeks of negotiations with central office, the community was granted their high school. The school will be four small schools housed in one building. The themes of the four schools are (1) social justice; (2) math, science, and technology; (3) visual and performing arts; and (4) world languages. Each school will have a population not exceeding 400 students (with the building totaling 1600 students).

The school did not come without a consent decree from central office requiring at least 30% of the school's population be African-Americans from the adjacent community. This became a challenge to the Mexican-American contingency due to lack of communication between the two neighborhoods. Where some may view this as a point of contention, many of the hunger strikers engaged the mandate understanding that the school would be for all children, not just those who live in their particular neighborhood, due to the support they received from numerous communities throughout the city. The moment is evident of CRT praxis in that the Mexican-American community demonstrated a willingness to abide by the consent decree, by

actively engaging the African-American community to participate in the school design process. It should be noted that preceding the consent decree, I was called in by some of the hunger strikers that I knew in other capacities to advise the group on curriculum development. Since that time I have been selected for membership on the design team to develop the social justice high school. CRT praxis continues to inform my work in that the design team has been given the charge to support work to tally the concerns of both African-American and Mexican-American communities to forge substantive curriculum and community inclusion to the school.

Currently the hunger strikers have developed an advisory board, responsible for the final negotiations with central office in developing the high school. The advisory board has oversight of the four design teams (for each of the high schools), along with supervision responsibilities for principal selection. Critical to the process has been buy-in from the African-American community. Where many of the Mexican families have supported the process since the hunger strike, many African-Americans are new to the process and remain skeptical due to their 'mandated' participation. However, many of the community members from the African-American contingency have been supportive of the process in developing education for both groups of children. However, the advisory board has a youth committee that has remained skeptical of the process. When members of the youth committee (at this time they were comprised of Mexican-American youth) were told the high school would also have African-American students, they responded the idea would never work due to existing tensions at the existing high school. The advisory board, in taking the issues and concerns of the young people seriously are currently involved in a massive effort to mobilize parents and youth from both communities in advising the design teams (along with the advisory board) on suggestions to ease possible tensions between both communities. Again, a critical race praxis is needed to unpack the realities of two low-income, communities of color that have hesitations of collaborative efforts with each other. Praxis is developed as both communities understand the dynamics of being poor and of color in the struggle for social justice. In this sense the third tenet of CRT in education is actualized by legitimizing and promoting 'the voices and narrative of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them' (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Central to building community between the two groups, the advisory board has organized community meetings in Mexican-American and African-American grade schools, community centers and churches to answer questions from both communities concerning the high school.

Coupled with considerable pressure from central office to comply with various regulations and liability policies, the advisory board and design teams are under considerable pressure to create a quality high school for African-American and Latino/a students. Where central office granted the high school to the community, they have not been helpful in the process of providing technical assistance for the development of the four schools. As the case with most central offices, their primary concern is with their liabilities in regards to state and federal standards. On numerous occasions members from central office have come into advisory board meetings and

made attempts at hijacking the community process, with the claim that they still have the 'final say' as to what happens with the school. As a collective, they have remained reluctant in granting community requests for deadlines, neighborhood boundaries, and proposal requests. Dates are consistently reset, central office representatives remain rude and uncooperative while community members trudge through efforts to mobilize both communities, hire principals, and develop curriculum. The task may appear ominous, but community members from both neighborhoods have remained diligent in guaranteeing a version of community education for all.

In this specific instance, socialist critique and CRT can operate synergistically, while providing necessary analysis and practice. Both epistemologies address the racialized realities of both communities as they are continually under-resourced and neglected by elements of the ruling class. For being labeled 'low-income', to the structural inequalities they experience based on race, their struggle is critical in highlighting the necessity of forging both trains of thought.

Conclusion: a call to ceasefire

As stated in the introduction, the challenge is for those members of the scholarly community that engage communities through schools is to utilize CRT where applicable. Arguing across conference tables is useless. For those of us who are concerned with the social justice project in education, our work will be done on the frontline with communities committed to change. In order to make such synergy to work both groups should understand neither race nor class exists as static phenomena. Leornardo (2004) is correct in that 'marginalized people have created rich inventories of culture, whereas race is imposed by White domination' (Leonardo, 2004, p. 491). Understanding this as a constant, the social justice project in education will require the recognition of the interplay of race and class to assess political, social, racial and economic dynamic. Doing so will require those on the side of CRT to recognize that there may be intra-racial issues that need class analysis, while not separating them from the larger construct of White supremacy. Those who engage class analysis will have to recognize the dynamics of racialization in discussions of the ruling classes, in understanding that racism is not the sole byproduct of capitalism. Instead, as demonstrated in this account, the dynamics of race inextricably identify a system of shifting hierarchies that are not married to a stringent interpretation of class analysis.

Nevertheless, I maintain the belief that documentation for the historical record informs the future group of those employed in the academy that will take the risk of recording their community engagement in spite of individual recognition and compensation. Where many would argue this to be a sabotage of the academic process, I would offer the contrary. Because we exist in a society that is systemically racist, the challenge becomes to forge community with the purpose of producing agents of change. Again, it is noted that this is not the purpose of every person employed in the academy. However, for those who speak to the 'need for change' the call has been placed to make our words bond to our actions. If we do not, the mistakes are ours.

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