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## 'An Existential Threat'

Right-wing Media and the Formation of Racialised Moral  
Panics

**Sarah Campbell**



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## ABSTRACT

*In September 2020, right-wing journalist, Christopher Rufo, went onto Fox News' 'Tucker Carlson Tonight' to decry the 'existential threat' that critical race theory (CRT) brings to the United States. In the months that followed, debates around the country erupted as Fox News' coverage of the new CRT 'issue' continued to grow. This project was conceptualised in response to left-wing news media's assertion that such coverage amounted to a moral panic. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of moral panics, this paper attempts to determine if the right-wing media coverage of the CRT debate truly constitutes the beginnings of a moral panic. Furthermore, given the unique historical events leading up to September 2020 (namely the Black Lives Matter protests of the summer) and the pointedly racial aspect of critical race theory as the constructed threat in the debate, this project examines the right-wing media coverage through a CRT lens to determine its potential as a racialised moral panic.*

*Employing Critical Discourse Analysis and quantitative content analysis, this project analyses a selection of Fox News articles between the dates of September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021. The results of the analysis found that the debate surrounding CRT in K-12 schools does in fact constitute a racialised moral panic. Meeting several criteria of the moral panic framework and employing a rhetoric of white victimhood, among other themes, this panic follows in the footsteps of a long history of racialized panics in the United States.*

## INTRODUCTION

Critical race theory, a decades-old theoretical framework once known by few outside of academia, became one of the most dominant storylines across American news media in 2021. Propelled by Fox News and right-wing journalist Christopher Rufo, critical race theory came to stand for conservative fears surrounding race, diversity, and equity in America:

We have successfully frozen their brand— “critical race theory”—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category (Rufo 2021).

As coverage reached a peak in June 2021 and legislation banning CRT in schools was introduced, left-wing media organizations such as CNN, New York Magazine, and the NYTimes began to accuse the right-wing media of manufacturing a moral panic (Bokat-Lindell 2021; Jones 2021; Tensley 2021). Many of these accusations highlighted the distinctly racial nature of the CRT debate, claiming that anti-CRT ideas stemmed from the prevalence of white supremacy in the US (Crenshaw 2021).

This project, therefore, seeks to determine if the left-wing media's claims are accurate and the right-wing media coverage of CRT in K-12 schools<sup>1</sup> constitutes the newest racialized moral panic in the United States. First, a theoretical and conceptual framework is established, with a particular focus on Cohen's (2011) stages of moral panics and Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) outline of critical race theory. Next, a methodological chapter outlines the rationale for selecting quantitative content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis as the forms of analysis for this project. Finally, the findings of the study are presented, and a discussion of the ramifications of the CRT debate are put forward.

Before continuing onto these sections, however, it is important to discuss my positionality as a researcher in this project. Critical race theory, first and foremost, has a distinctive activist dimension to its application; it not only tries to understand the racial inequalities endemic in

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<sup>1</sup> For my non-American readers, K-12 schools refers to schooling between the ages of 5 and 18, before attending college.

our society, but to change them and transform them for the better (Delgado and Stefancic 2017: 8). I therefore wish to situate this research as an activist project seeking to shed light on the myriad of ways media discourse and societal panics can result in the perpetuation of racial inequality in the United States. Furthermore, I will mention the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement various times throughout this paper. I, myself, participated in the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, and I firmly believe that systemic racism continues to permeate every aspect of life in the United States. I am a well-educated, American-born, queer white woman who grew up in a left-wing state and have dedicated my academic pursuits to the study of sociology and politics. While I strive to maintain an unbiased approach throughout my analysis, it is undeniable that my positionality influences my interpretations and understandings of this project.

## **THEORETICAL CHAPTER**

Beginning with a review of the literature, this chapter introduces moral panic theory and examines the history of racialized moral panics in the United States. It then reviews the scholarship on critical race theory and its application in the field of education. Finally, it contextualises the CRT debate in the United States and provides preliminary theories on the panic. Following the literature review, this chapter outlines how the theoretical frameworks will inform the project. It then concludes with my research aims, research question, and hypotheses.

### Literature Review

#### Moral Panic Theory

The term 'moral panic' was coined by UK theorist, Stanley Cohen, in his 1972 book, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. While scholars have developed their own models and critiques in the fifty years since its inception, Cohen's (2011) original six-stage model remains the most referenced when discussing moral panics:

## 'An Existential Threat'

SARAH CAMPBELL

1. Emergence: a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests
2. Media Inventory: its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media
3. Moral Entrepreneurs: the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians, and other right-thinking people
4. Experts: socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions
5. Coping and Resolution: ways of coping are evolved or resorted to
6. Fade Away and Legacy: the condition then disappears, submerges, or deteriorates and becomes more visible

In his book, *Moral Panics and the Media*, Chas Critcher (2003: 2) argues that any 'moral panic' model is an ideal type and therefore 'not an end but a means' used 'for the comparison of the ideal type and the 'facts.'" This means an event can still be deemed a moral panic without perfectly fitting every stage of the model. Such flexibility is key when applying Cohen's model to different countries and time periods.

Moral panic scholarship in the United States, for example, differs greatly from the original UK context. While the British tradition focuses on social control outcomes influenced by political elites and the media, the American tradition is more interested in 'the process of social construction' and 'how it is played out in public arenas' (Critcher 2003: 29). Such differences can be partially attributed to these countries' unique government structures. Given the emphasis on federalism in the US, moral panics are more likely to begin locally and then spread to a national level. Additionally, while the British legal system is meant to be divorced from political views, US law enforcement is 'highly politicized with police chiefs, district attorneys, and judges directly' serving as political appointees (Critcher 2003: 124). The two-party system in the US similarly increases politicization and polarization within the country. Tappin and McKay (2019: 213) argue that animosity between Republicans and Democrats is a prominent feature of American life, and that 'even mild political disagreement' is likely to be attributed to the opposing party's 'lack of morals.' Critcher (2003: 125) contends that this

## 'An Existential Threat'

SARAH CAMPBELL

increased politicization in the US causes 'the whole system to be more leaky', creating situations in which a few 'strategically placed individuals' can influence a moral panic with little constraints.

This idea of powerful individuals influencing a moral panic is reminiscent of Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda's (2009) three theories of moral panic formation. The authors argue that society is divided into three rungs—the power elite, middle-level interest groups, and the grassroots—and that moral panics can be started by any single, or any combination, of these three groups. According to the elite-engineered model, elites 'engineer a panic from a nonexistent or trivial threat' in order to 'gain something of value or divert attention away from [other] issues' (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009: 54). The interest-group model argues that moral panics originate from individuals 'somewhere in society's middle strata: professional associations, journalists with a mission, religious groups' etc. with the goal of maximizing their own ideology and/or to seek a status change (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009: 54). Finally, the grassroots model argues that moral panics are 'spontaneous eruptions of fear' that are initiated 'from the bottom up.' It is important to note that just as the three rungs of society interact and overlap, these three models often feed into one another to create a moral panic. While Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009: 55) themselves reject the elite-engineered theory, instead preferring a combination of grassroots and interest group theories, they recognize that each potential moral panic constitutes a different combination.

This brings into question one of the main debates amongst moral panic theorists: the distinction between the media and the public. Arnold Hunt (1997: 664) argues that no theory of moral panic has 'provided a satisfactory explanation of the relationship between the media and public opinion.' Similarly, Keith Tester (1994: 85) has criticized the assumption that 'simply because there was a moral panic in the media there must also have been a moral panic among the viewers and readers.' While these critiques are understandable, I adopt Critcher's (2003: 137) conceptualization of moral panics wherein 'support from the public is a bonus not a necessity.' This is because, as Golding and Middleton assert, ' [the media] is public opinion, or at least that visible version of it to which politicians and administrations respond' (as quoted in Critcher 2003: 138). A moral panic, therefore, becomes possible if enough claims

makers, members of the mass media, and political elite decide there is an issue and action is required.

What then sparks a moral panic? J.C. Davis argues that 'when moral boundaries are undergoing wholesale reappraisal or revision, as, for instance, in the wake of a revolution... moral uncertainty can lead to great anxiety or 'moral panic' and to the demand for a reassertion or redefinition of moral boundaries' (as quoted in Hunt 1997: 632). Such an assertion lends itself to this project as the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020, that many people described as a 'racial reckoning' (Demby 2021b), could be considered a 'revolution.' In addition to generalized anxiety, Mike King (2015: 91) argues that a key facet of any moral panic is its ability to create 'political polarization—to manufacture a commonsense positioning of a 'folk devil' that needs to be exorcised in the service of a 'good public.'" These threats, or 'folk devils', can come in many forms, but time and time again conservatives 'lay the blame for moral decline on liberal permissiveness, the collapse of family life and the failings of schools' (Critchler 2003: 68). In fact, as Critchler (2003: 158) asserts, moral panics centred on 'defending the innocence of childhood against corruption' have become increasingly prevalent. This is because 'the child has become a way of speaking about society itself' (Jenks 2005: 130). Of course, the idea of protecting children is only one aspect of modern-day moral panics. The next section will discuss another prevalent theme: race.

### History of Racialized Moral Panics

In his seminal piece, Cohen (2011: 56) recognizes the unique role that racialised stereotypes can play in moral panics, often drawing upon and reproducing longstanding societal fears and anxieties:

The process of spurious attribution is not, of course, random. The audience has existing stereotypes of other folk devils to draw upon and, as with racial stereotyping, there is a readily available composite image which the new picture can be grafted on to.

As established in the previous section, a feeling of 'destabilization of the moral order may predispose' individuals 'to seek out the moral certainty which derives from identifying a common enemy' (Critchler 2003: 122). Many scholars have found that in the history of the United States, this common enemy is often people of colour (Carlson 2016; Doran 2008; King



2015; Walsh 2020). Jennifer Carlson (2016: 2), for example, argues that discourse describing Black men as 'criminal threats' dates back to 'antebellum fears of slave revolt,' and that since the 1960s, the media has played a large role in perpetuating the stereotype of Black criminality. King's (2015) research on the media's coverage of the 'knockout game'—random Black-on-white assaults—in 2013 demonstrates one of the most recent moral panics centred on race and violent crime. King (2015: 85) argues that current racial discourse in the US promotes the idea that 'white Americans are systemically subordinated' and that media outlets have played a key role in 'stoking racialized moral panics and normalizing what had once been fringe theories of white racial victimhood.'

This normalization of white victimhood discourse is demonstrated by a 2021 Pew Research Center survey that found 40% of Americans believe there is at least some discrimination against white people in the US, with 63% of Republicans claiming so compared to only 20% of Democrats (Daniller 2021). It is in this way that news outlets play a significant role in racialised moral panic formation by influencing *how* the public thinks about racial issues (Carlson 2016: 2).

### Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory first entered academic thought in the 1970s as legal scholars and activists around the US began to notice that the advances of the Civil Rights era had stalled (Delgado and Stefancic 2017: 4). Due to these origins, critical race theory has a foundation in critical legal scholarship—a revolutionary analysis of the law that focuses on exposing the relationship between law and social power. Early critical race theorists, however, did not believe that critical legal scholars placed enough emphasis on the relationship between law and racial power—resulting in the formation of CRT as a new frame of analysis (Roithmayr 1999: 3).

In *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2017: 9) identify the four basic tenets of critical race theory: (1) racism is an ordinary aspect of everyday life; (2) the often-liberal ideals of 'color blindness,' 'objectivity,' and 'meritocracy' are harmful in anti-racist projects; (3) race and racism are products of social thought and are thus specific to

historic and geographic context; and (4) the 'experiential knowledge of people of color' is imperative to the study of law and society.

Of course, there has been pushback to many of these tenets. Literary critic Stanley Crouch argued that it is 'psychologically injurious' for young people of colour to see highly acclaimed academics tell them that racism is an ordinary aspect of everyday life (as quoted in Tate 1999: 256). This is because, for some, the first tenet of CRT may suggest that continued racial progress is not possible. Such a concern, while understandable, is a fundamental misunderstanding of CRT's values. Leaders in the field argue that, unlike many academic disciplines, CRT contains an activist dimension that works to study racial hierarchies *and* transform them for the better (Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Ladson-Billings 1999; Roithmayr 1999).

Other critics question the value of a legal theory dedicated to studying race. Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres, for example, decry CRT's use of race as 'the central category of analysis' over 'a more substantive critique of capitalism' (as quoted in Ledesma and Calderón 2015: 207). This concern over the theory's heavy focus on race can be connected to fears over a lack of intersectionality within the field. However, in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, Kimberly Crenshaw (1995: 354) writes extensively on the importance of intersectionality:

One is race-d in tandem with other social factors, such that one can say that being race-d as a woman of color may diverge significantly from the means by which those engendered as male are race-d. Yet, antidiscrimination law as well as liberal race and gender politics overlook the ways that race-ing and en-gendering are interpolated...The rigidity of this framework and its continued centrality in law, politics, and public policy create a host of problems.

It is in this way that Crenshaw and other CRT scholars are not just interested in race, but in how race intersects with other identities in relation to the law.

Related to concerns over intersectionality, critics often lament the influence that the Black-white binary has on CRT.<sup>2</sup> According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017: 77), the Black-white

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper I will use a capitalized "Black" and a lowercase "white" following the Insight Center's belief that "leaving white in lowercase represents a righting of a long-standing wrong and a demand for dignity and racial equity," (Appiah 2020).

binary effectively dictates that Black people represent the 'prototypical minority group' in America and that all other racial minorities must compare their grievances to those of the Black community. This paradigm serves to 'cast minority groups against one another' in order to stop coalition building and uphold the dominance of white supremacy (Delgado and Stefancic 2017: 81). In the early 2000s, critical race theorists began to counter this paradigm by embracing the work of Latine (LatCrit),<sup>3</sup> Asian American, and Muslim scholars who were dedicated to exploring the racialization of groups outside the Black-white binary (Delgado and Stefancic 2017: 3). It is through this inclusion that critical race theorists were able to broaden their understanding of institutionalised racism within the United States (Delgado and Stefancic 2017: 78):

History textbooks may devote considerable space to the tremendously significant issue of slavery but overlook or devote scant treatment to the intense persecution of Chinese in California and elsewhere. Many may also ignore the equally important role of Conquest and the wars with Mexico and Spain in shaping Latino history. Even rarer would be a textbook that discusses the recent wave of intense anti-Muslim suspicion that gripped the country in the years following 9/11.

This example not only reveals the pervasiveness of the Black-white binary in American society, but also demonstrates the way CRT can be used to shine light on such racial inequities and suggest changes for improvement. The following section continues to explore the ways in which critical race theory has been applied to the field of education.

### Critical Race Theory in Education

In 1995, *Teachers College Record* published 'Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education' in which Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate proposed that the legal framework of CRT could be used to examine racial inequality within education. They argue that schooling has been used to sustain inequality, first by denying Black children access to school altogether, then with school segregation, and more recently through white flight<sup>4</sup>, private schools, and

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<sup>3</sup> I have elected to use the term "Latine" instead of "Latinx" as it uses the more common letter "e" from the Spanish language to represent gender neutrality (McGee 2022).

<sup>4</sup> White flight is the phenomenon wherein white people leave places (communities, schools, etc.) when they become increasingly populated by racial minorities (Anon n.d.).

tracking<sup>5</sup> (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995: 60). Taylor (1999: 182) argues that in order to effectively apply CRT to education, scholars must understand the 'historical/legal analysis of racially segregated education and the litigation that challenged it.' It is this historical context that informs our understanding of modern-day educational practices and inequalities.

In later works, Ladson-Billings (1999) outlines four areas of education that would benefit from a CRT analysis: curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school funding. To begin, it is generally argued that standardized school curriculum are 'culturally specific artifacts' that privilege white cultural knowledge over all else. In her article, *Emancipatory Narratives: Rewriting the Master Script in the School Curriculum*, Ellen Swartz (1992: 341) contends:

Master scripting silences multiple voices and perspectives, primarily by legitimizing dominant, White, upper-class, male voicings as the 'standard' knowledge students need to know. All other accounts and perspectives are omitted from the master script unless they can be disempowered through misrepresentation.

Relatedly, Dolores Delgado Bernal and Octavio Villalpando (2002: 169) coined the term 'apartheid of knowledge' to discuss the way that academics of colour are often marginalized, discredited, and devalued as 'biased and nonrigorous' in their work.

Second, Ladson-Billings (1999: 22) argues that instructional strategies often cast Black students as 'deficient.' Based in liberal ideals of colour-blindness and meritocracy, educational instruction is framed as a 'one size fits all' service. It is important to note that while the ideal of colour-blindness can be admirable, its implementation in society often 'represses and renders irrelevant the ways in which race shapes social relationships' (Roithmayr 1999: 2). This means that when teaching strategies fail, the student, not the techniques, are considered deficient. This deficit view means that Black and Latine students have been disproportionately placed into lower educational tracks in K-12 school, and are therefore given fewer educational opportunities (Dixson and Rousseau 2005: 8).

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<sup>5</sup> The Public-School Review defines tracking as "a system in which students are divided into classes based on their overall achievement" (Barrington 2020). Originally created to cater to students' whose second language was English, this tracking often resulted in "internal segregation within the American public school system" (Barrington 2020).

Third, critical race theorists in education view standardized assessment measures as a tool meant to legitimize the idea of Black deficiency. Roithmayr (1999: 5) argues that 'national standards' are a form of colonialism that establishes 'Westernized conceptions of enlightened thinking' as the norm in education. Critics of the SAT, for example, have found that test questions are often 'class bound,' requiring specialized knowledge of items such as 'polo mallets and regattas,' and that two of the best predictors of a student's SAT score are their father's occupation and their zip code (Delgado and Stefancic 2017: 116). It is in this way that standardized tests force students to assimilate to the wider 'white culture' or risk being left behind.

Finally, Ladson-Billings (1999: 24) argues that inequality in school funding is a 'function of institutional and structural racism.' In their seminal article on CRT and education Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995: 47) contend that US society is based on 'property rights rather than human rights' and that the intersection of race and property serves as an analytical tool for understanding educational inequity. This is because racist policies such as real estate steering,<sup>6</sup> redlining,<sup>7</sup> and increased interest rates on loans and mortgages have confined people of colour to less desirable neighbourhoods and prevented Black residents from owning homes for much of history (Delgado and Stefancic 2017: 116). This discrimination compounds further when one considers the fact that almost every state in the country funds schools based on property taxes, meaning more expensive areas have better-funded schools. It is in this way that 'without suffering a single act of personal racism, most Black Americans suffer the consequences of systemic and structural racism,' thus excluding them from opportunities for upward mobility that education has provided for many poor white students (Delgado and Stefancic 2017: 116; Ladson-Billings 1999: 24).

It would be erroneous to claim that the recent debate over critical race theory's role in K-12 education in the United States is centred on the complex discussions above. Most Americans have not heard of Landson-Billings or even Delgado and Stefancic. Instead, Americans are

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<sup>6</sup> Real estate steering is the practice of influencing a homebuyer to purchase in certain communities based on factors such as their race, colour, or national origin (NAR 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica defines redlining as the "discriminatory practice in which a mortgage lender denies loans or an insurance provider restricts services to certain areas of a community, often because of the racial characteristics of the applicant" (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.).

learning about CRT through politicians, the media, and anti-CRT activists. It is for this reason that the next section is dedicated to contextualizing the recent public debate.

### Contextualising the Public Debate

An entire book could be written about the events preceding the CRT debate in September of 2020. An in-depth history of the United States and the influence of racism, capitalism, politics, and so much more would have to be laid out to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the sociocultural context that made this panic a reality. Unfortunately, this is not a book, so my contextualization will have to be brief [see APPENDIX E for a more in-depth timeline of events].

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, resulting in school closures, shifts to online learning, work from home, and general feelings of fear and uncertainty across the nation (Decker 2020). On May 25<sup>th</sup>, two months into the pandemic, George Floyd was murdered by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Video footage of the horrific event circulated the country, and the following day protests began. Rallying under the slogan of Black Lives Matter, these protests continued for 100 consecutive days, growing in size and becoming the largest movement in American history (Buchanan, Bui, and Patel 2020).

In July 2020, amongst nationwide calls for racial justice, a city of Seattle employee sent documentation of the city's anti-bias training to Christopher Rufo, a journalist for the conservative magazine, *City Journal* (Wallace-Wells 2021). Rufo, intrigued by the documents, began researching anti-racism seminars and soon found a link to critical race theory. Stating that conservatives 'needed new language' to help fight 'progressive racial ideology,' Rufo described CRT as 'the perfect villain' (as quoted in Wallace-Wells 2021). On September 2<sup>nd</sup>, after publishing several articles on the topic for *City Journal*, Rufo appeared on Fox News' 'Tucker Carlson Tonight' with a plea to the American people and a message for President Trump:

Conservatives need to wake up. This is an existential threat to the United States. And the bureaucracy, even under Trump, is being weaponized against core American values. And I'd like to make it explicit: The President and the White

House—it's within their authority to immediately issue an executive order to abolish critical-race-theory training from the federal government. And I call on the President to immediately issue this executive order—to stamp out this destructive, divisive, pseudoscientific ideology (as quoted in Wallace-Wells 2021).

The following day, Rufo received a call from the White House—the President had seen his segment on Fox News, and he wanted to act. Soon after, Rufo flew to Washington, D.C., and a few weeks later Trump issued his first executive order limiting diversity trainings (Wallace-Wells 2021).

Given this brief account of events leading up to the CRT debate, it seems plausible that the actions of Rufo, Trump, and later the larger Republican party constitute a combination of an elite and interest-group engineered moral panic, as outlined by Goode and Ben-Yehuda. Furthermore, the social anxiety caused by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the BLM protests created a populous susceptible to panic in an effort to regain a sense of control over their rapidly changing environment (Cricher 2003: 27). As Rufo predicted, CRT became 'the perfect villain' to latch onto.

### Theoretical Framework

Both moral panic theory and critical race theory emphasize the importance that discourse plays in hierarchies of power (Cohen 2011; Cricher 2003; Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Critical race theorists argue that the 'dominant group justifies its power with stories' in order to 'construct a reality' that maintains their privilege (Ladson-Billings 1999: 16), while moral panic theorists argue that 'stylized and stereotypical' depictions of a perceived threat and 'rhetoric of victimhood' are common discursive tools in the formation of a moral panic (Cohen 2011: xxvii). The theoretical framework of this paper is thus built on Fairclough's assertion that discourse is both socially shaped and socially shaping. It is therefore never neutral, but always represents 'a particular view' of society (Fairclough 2011: 56).

It is for this reason that the media's role in moral panics is so important. As Spector and Kitsuse argue, the media serves to 'publicize and disseminate' panics 'as well as participate in them' (as quoted in Cricher 2003: 22). I therefore reject Goode and Ben-Yehuda's (2009) criteria that moral panics require support from the public, instead electing to adopt Golding and Middleton's argument that 'for all intents and purposes [the media] is public opinion'

(Critcher 2003: 138). This understanding of the media's role in moral panic formation makes newspaper coverage of the CRT debate a perfect text for analysis.

Furthermore, as outlined above, the need to protect children and the perceived threat of people of colour are two common narratives of modern moral panics. This dissertation seeks to analyse these narratives, along with the frameworks of critical race theory, to situate the debate surrounding CRT's implementation in K-12 schools as a potential *racialized* moral panic. This will involve examining media discourse for rhetoric advocating ideals of colour-blindness, objectivity, and meritocracy in school (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995), as well as calls of reverse discrimination or white victimhood (King 2015).

Finally, moral panics rely on political polarization and, as established by Tappin and McKay (2019), that polarization is often split down party lines of Democrats and Republicans. The criticisms against CRT in the US have largely been vocalized by Republicans such as Rufo and Trump. This dominance of Republican voices on the anti-CRT side of the debate informed my decision to solely focus on right-wing media.

## Research Aims

The objective of this project is to approach the critical race theory debate in the United States through the lens of a racialised moral panic. To achieve this, an analysis of Fox News articles has been conducted using both content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. Ultimately, this project seeks to address the following questions and hypotheses:

RQ: To what extent does the right-wing media coverage of critical race theory in K-12 schools in the United States constitute a racialized moral panic?

H1: The more critical of Critical Race Theory, the more likely the article will present it as a threat to America.

H2: The more critical of Critical Race Theory, the more likely the article will support the banning of CRT in education.

H3: The more critical of Critical Race Theory, the more likely the article will employ rhetoric of reverse-discrimination or white victimhood.



## **METHODOLOGY CHAPTER**

This chapter presents my rationale for using both quantitative content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis as empirical methods for investigating the possible racialized moral panic surrounding CRT in K-12 schools in the US. Following this rationale, I outline my sampling strategy for both methods and discuss the design of research tools. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of limitations and ethics.

### **Rationale for Methodology**

Mixed method projects combining qualitative and quantitative approaches are increasingly viewed as preferable in research studies as they provide a more comprehensive understanding than a single, standalone method (Palinkas *et al.* 2015: 533). Furthermore, leading scholars from the theoretical frameworks of this paper—moral panic theory and critical race theory—advocate for a mixed methods approach.

Moral panic scholars are particularly interested in the media’s ‘exaggeration and distortion of the seriousness of events’, including disproportionate news coverage and the use of highly emotive language (Cricher 2003: 12). This focus on the frequency of certain media reporting lends itself to a quantitative content analysis approach as a means to count the occurrence of such coverage. By using sampling strategies and operationalized codes, content analysis helps ‘reduce communication phenomena to manageable data from which inferences may be drawn’ (Riffe *et al.* 2019: 22). This allows the researcher to analyse large datasets, ensuring breadth of understanding across a prolonged length of time, thereby providing a simple way of assessing the beginning stages of a moral panic as discussed in the literature review.

In addition to content analysis, moral panic theorists also recognize the benefit that discourse analysis provides in analysing how certain linguistic occurrences can operate as exclusionary devices while ‘serving to validate the definitions and responses characteristic of moral panics’ (Cricher 2003: 168). If content analysis is used to obtain a breadth of understanding, then discourse analysis is used to obtain depth of understanding (Palinkas *et al.* 2015: 533). Critical

Discourse Analysis (CDA<sup>8</sup>), in particular, focuses on how language is used as a cultural tool to mediate 'relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge' (Rogers *et al.* 2005: 367). The method is particularly relevant in this study as it is largely influenced by critical theory—the same field of study as critical race theory. In fact, critics of CDA argue that the method should draw upon CRT scholarship more readily, as CDA traditionally utilizes Euro-American frameworks that continue the marginalization of historically oppressed groups (Rogers *et al.* 2005: 385).

This emphasis on qualitative methods such as Critical Discourse Analysis, has caused concern amongst CRT critics who fear that 'narrative and rhetoric may replace legal doctrine in a domain that values abstract and formal reasoning' (Taylor 1999: 198). These critics would much more appreciate the 'systematic and replicable examination' that content analysis provides (Riffe *et al.* 2019: 23). However, as Dixon and Rousseau (2005: 22) highlight, CRT is interdisciplinary in nature, ultimately employing a 'problem-centred approach' that can utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to shed light on racial inequity. It is in this way that content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis complement one another and allow for a more in-depth understanding of the power-structures surrounding this potential moral panic.

### Sampling

When analysing right-wing media in the United States, there is no news organization more influential than Fox News. According to a 2020 Pew Research Center survey, 65% of Republicans trust Fox News, with 60% turning to the source on a weekly basis (Jurkowitz *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, on an ideological scale, 'the average Fox News consumer is to the right of the average U.S. adult' (Gramlich 2020). It is this prevalence of Fox News among right-wing Americans that makes it ideal for analysing the possible racialized moral panic surrounding critical race theory in K-12 schools.

Unfortunately, Fox News does not have a reliable database of past publications. In the absence of a comprehensive archive, I conducted a day-by-day search on the Fox News website for

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<sup>8</sup> Following the work of Gee (2003), I will be using the capitalized term "Critical Discourse Analysis" (or CDA) to refer to the analytical approach developed by Fairclough, as opposed to lowercase "critical discourse analysis" which includes a "wider array of approaches."

articles containing the phrase 'critical race theory.' I collected articles from September 2020, when Rufo first went on Fox News to discuss CRT, through December 2021.<sup>9</sup> Since I only included articles that explicitly mentioned critical race theory, many publications that were obviously discussing the topic but did not mention CRT were excluded such as 'Iranian immigrant dad slams indoctrination in schools' and 'CA county school board trustee says he's silenced after reports of Marxist-inspired ethics curriculum.' Similarly, given the limited search function on the Fox News website, if there were more than 10 articles that mentioned critical race theory published in a single day, the search results were capped. This happened for 23 out of my 487 days of collection.

Despite these constraints, I was able to compile a total of n=741 articles containing the phrase 'critical race theory.' I then sorted the articles into their main topic of focus: K-12 Schools; College; Military; Government Training; and Other. This resulted in n=558 (75%) articles discussing critical race theory in the context of K-12 schools in the U.S. In an ideal content analysis without time constraints, all 558 articles would be analysed and coded, however, for the purposes of this study, I followed O'Connor and Joffe's (2020: 5) recommendation of sampling 10-25% of the data.

Given this project's mixing of quantitative and qualitative methods, I followed the work of Felthan-King and Macleod (2016: 3) by combining purposive sampling and systematic sampling in order to ensure a representative, unbiased sample for my content analysis and information-rich texts for my CDA. To obtain a representative sample across all 16 months of analysis, I utilized a systematic sampling method, selecting every 4<sup>th</sup> article in the chronologically sorted dataset. This resulted in n=139 articles for content analysis, or 25% of the overall data set. Each of the 139 articles was then systematically reviewed using a list of criteria for purposeful sampling:

1. The selected articles should be at least 500 words each.
2. At least one article should be selected for each of the following topics: parent focus, teacher focus, school focus, federal focus, state focus, advocate focus, political focus.

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<sup>9</sup> This end date was ultimately an arbitrary choice, but it is important to note that no uniquely relevant coverage appeared to occur between December 2021 and the commencement of this project in March 2022.

3. Extreme outliers should not be selected as this sample should be representative of the general news coverage of critical race theory.

Following Palinkas *et al.* (2015: 534), texts were continuously sampled until no new substantive information was uncovered. This resulted in a total of 10 articles for CDA [APPENDIX C].

### Content Analysis Research Tools

Once the content analysis sample was gathered, I began developing a coding frame and codebook. My general coding frame stemmed from Critcher's (2003) framework for analysing moral panics and Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) outline of critical race theory. I then utilized a 'manual holistic approach' wherein I began to review the texts, developing relevant codes along the way (Matthes and Kohring 2008: 60). This resulted in 48 original codes that were subsequently clustered into themes, or 'code families,' in order to simplify the coding process (Campbell *et al.* 2013: 301).

Upon completion of the codebook, 14 articles were selected for intercoder reliability using a random number generator. I chose an American student from the Politics and Communication programme at London School of Economics and Political Science as my co-coder as they would be privy to the CRT debate in the US, and they would already have a basic understanding of the political climate between September 2020 and December 2021. The initial round of intercoder reliability ranged from .86 to 1.0 for 83% of the codes. Following Hruschka *et al.* (2004: 320), the co-coder and I underwent an 'iterative process of codebook revision and clarification' in order to increase intercoder reliability [Appendix A]. After these revisions, we entered a second round of intercoder reliability in which we re-coded the questions that did not originally meet suitable agreement. With this second round of coding we were able to achieve Neuendorf's 'rule of thumb' of .8 or higher for all remaining codes [APPENDIX B] (O'Connor and Joffe 2020: 9).

Following the completion of coding, all data was entered into RStudio for analysis. As each code was either nominal or ordinal in nature, the data was analysed using frequencies and

cross tabulations. Fisher's Exact Test was then calculated to determine the statistical significance of association between variables.<sup>10</sup>

## Critical Discourse Analysis Research Tools

As discussed above, the 10 articles selected for CDA were analysed according to the following three dimensions of Fairclough's (2011) framework:

1. Textual—Analysis of specific word choice, syntax, or grammar, such as the use of pronouns to construct a close or distant relationship between the writer and reader. This dimension will identify the rhetorical devices utilized to delegitimize CRT while depicting anti-CRT individuals as morally superior.
2. Discursive—Analysis of how language and society come together through discourse. This dimension will highlight the repeated references to speeches by anti-CRT leaders such as Christopher Rufo or Donald Trump.
3. Societal—Analysis of the social and cultural context in which the communicative event occurs. Specifically, this dimension will consider the importance of US patriotism in times of uncertainty and how it informs reactions to perceived societal threats.

Each of the 10 articles were hand-coded [APPENDIX D] resulting in a number of prevalent themes reflecting Fairclough's three dimensions.

## Limitations and Ethics

Before presenting the findings of this study it is important to address certain methodological limitations of content analysis and CDA. Content analysis, while often presented as a rational and objective form of analysis, is not immune to bias. In fact, when analysing latent content, coders often engage in 'subjective interpretation based on their own mental schema' (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken 2002: 589). Similarly, as Fairclough (2013: 7) asserts, CDA 'focuses on what is wrong with a society, and how 'wrongs' might be 'righted''. Just as my own mental schema impacts the content analysis coding, my ideas of 'right' and 'wrong'

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<sup>10</sup> I have elected to use Fishers Test over chi-square test as it has been proven to be more accurate and is able to calculate statistical significance with smaller sample sizes (Upton 1992).

greatly impact the CDA coding. In order to reduce my own personal bias, I have positioned my research in line with leading scholars in the field, but it is important that readers keep my positionality as a researcher at the forefront of their minds.

Finally, an ethics form outlining the framework and methodological approach of this project was submitted in accordance with London School of Economics and Political Science guidelines on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022, before commencing. Upon review, no ethical concerns were apparent.

## FINDINGS CHAPTER

This chapter reviews the findings and interpretations of both the content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. It will begin by situating the CRT debate in the early stages of a moral panic. It will then discuss the three general themes as outlined by my hypotheses: CRT as a threat to America; calls for the banning of CRT; and the framing of CRT as racist. Each theme contains sub-groups that analyse specific reoccurring patterns found during CDA<sup>11</sup> and content analysis.<sup>12</sup>

### Beginnings of the Moral Panic

As Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) assert, 'moral panics are volatile; they erupt fairly quickly and nearly as suddenly subside.' Given the current continuation of the CRT debate in the United States, it is unclear if the panic has subsided.<sup>13</sup> However, the sudden emersion of the threat is undeniable.

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<sup>11</sup> All block-quotes in this chapter come from CDA articles.

<sup>12</sup> It is also worth noting that both samples contained articles largely comprised of quotes. It is for this reason that many of my CDA examples are quotes from parents/teachers/politicians.

<sup>13</sup> This study has not continued to tract the frequency of CRT articles after December 2021, but articles such as Fox News' "Minnesota-based parental rights group launches effort to support, train school board candidates" published on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022, continue to be published.

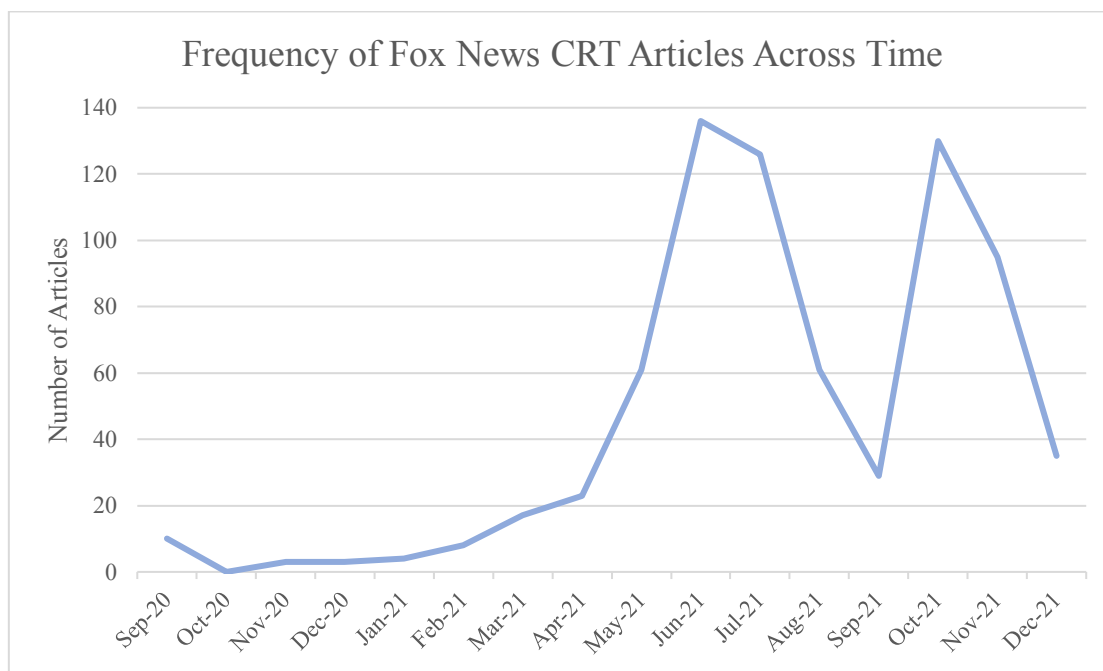


Figure 1: Frequency of Fox News CRT Articles Across Time

Figure 1, which includes all 741 Fox News articles mentioning 'critical race theory' from September 2020, through December 2021, demonstrates this volatility with the first peak occurring in June 2021 and the second occurring in October 2021. The sudden increase in coverage is even more meaningful to this study when considering the focus of the articles as shown in Figure 2: there were a total of 558 articles discussing CRT in the context of K-12 schools, a staggering 75% of all articles published.

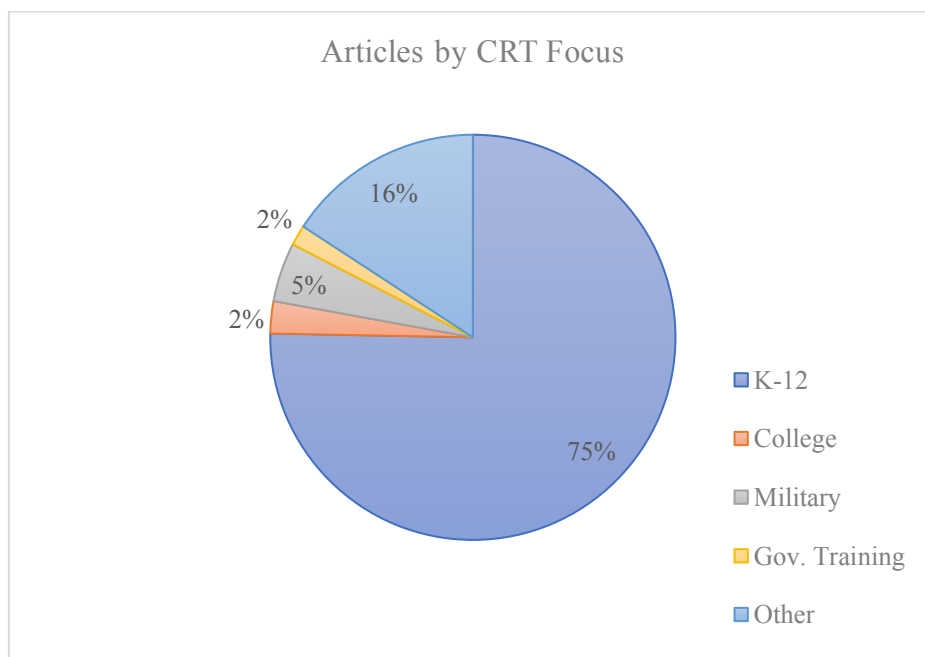


Figure 2: Articles by CRT Focus

This means that the CRT debate, while starting off as a discussion about racial sensitivity training in the federal government, became consumed by the possibility that such trainings might be impacting schools. This fixation on CRT in K-12 schools coincides with the literature linking moral panics to fears surrounding the vulnerability of children (Critcher 2003).

With the sudden emergence of the CRT debate established, we move onto the second stage of moral panics: media inventory (Cohen 2011). While the specific media coverage of the debate will be discussed in-depth below, it is important to lay out some of the general themes of the data. To begin, there is a clear negative slant to the coverage of the 139 content analysis articles. As seen in Figure 3, 98 (70.5%) of the articles portrayed CRT as 'very negative' or 'negative'. Comparatively, only 5 articles were coded as having a 'positive' portrayal, and none were deemed to have a 'very positive' portrayal. This slant demonstrates the existence of a common message among Fox News coverage. Such consensus is key, as Good and Ben-Yehuda (2009: 34) argue that in order for a moral panic to form 'there must be at least a certain minimal measure of consensus in the society as a whole—or in designated segments of the society'



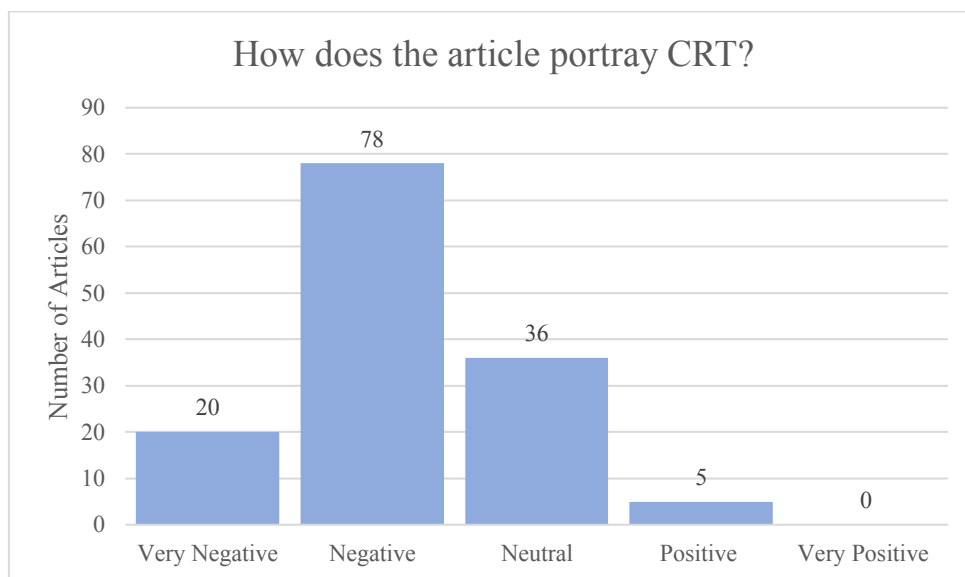


Figure 3: Article Portrayal of CRT

One proven tactic of ensuring a single message is the exclusion of opposing voices. In fact, according to Critcher (2003: 147), the realization of a 'fully fledged moral panic' depends on the elimination of dissenting voices. Figure 4 clearly demonstrates the underrepresentation of pro-CRT voices in Fox News coverage.

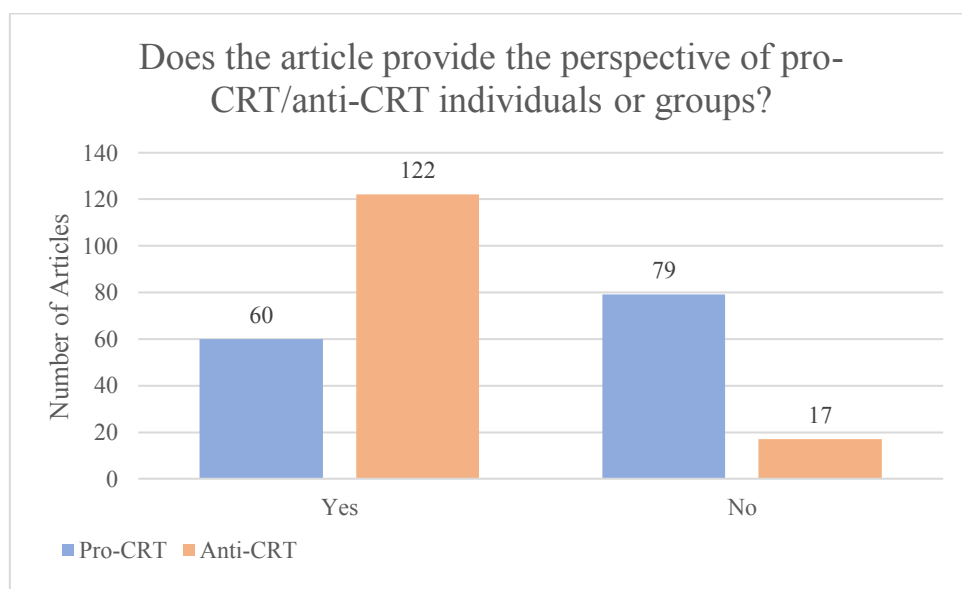


Figure 4: Perspective of Pro-CRT/Anti-CRT

Here we can see that 122 (87.8%) of the articles include anti-CRT perspectives while only 60 (43.2%) include the perspectives of pro-CRT individuals. Rufo, in particular, is repeatedly used as one of these anti-CRT voices – his name appearing a staggering 67 times in 19 separate

content analysis articles—demonstrating his role as a claims maker. Such a lack of pro-CRT voices allows the media to more easily present CRT, and those who support it, as a 'stylized and stereotypical' threat, as outlined by Cohen (2011).<sup>14</sup> This stylized understanding of CRT is demonstrated by the fact that only 35 of the content analysis articles attempt to define the concept and in doing so, only 9 (25.7%) provide a fully accurate definition, 11 (31.4%) a partially accurate definition, and 15 (42.9%) an inaccurate or misleading definition. Furthermore, CDA revealed that each of the 10 articles selected are written by white men—a fact that seems significant given that the debate around critical race theory is so clearly related to race. The lack of people of colour as writers could very well contribute to the 'stylized and stereotypical' depiction of CRT.

### CRT as a Threat to America

As established in the theoretical chapter, the first stage of a moral panic occurs when 'a condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests' (Cohen 2011). Upon analysis of the texts, the portrayal of CRT, and those who support it, as a threat to America and its citizenry became clear. One such example appears in a July 25<sup>th</sup> article by Michael Ruiz and Andrew Murray (2021):

The Cuban-American candidate told Fox News Friday that critical race theory [...] will pose a national security threat down the line. "I was at an event where a Marine came up to me and said, listen... 'How do you as a country recruit young men and women to be willing to serve and possibly die for the country if they're told from the early stage that somehow their country is inherently broke, and evil, and racist and can't be redeemed?'"

In this example, Jason Miyares, then-Republican candidate for Virginia attorney general<sup>15</sup>, goes so far as to claim critical race theory will lead to a 'national security threat.' He then appeals to readers' sense of patriotism and reverence for the armed forces by recounting a story of a Marine expressing their concern about the country's future. Miyares is able to depict CRT not only as a threat to society, but as conflicting with American ideals and the image of

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<sup>14</sup> Additionally, content analysis found that pro-CRT views were regularly discredited while anti-CRT perspectives were deemed reliable [see APPENDIX F for additional table].

<sup>15</sup> He went on to become attorney general, entering office on January 15, 2022.

## 'An Existential Threat'

SARAH CAMPBELL

America as the protector of the world. Interestingly, in saying that children are taught America is 'racist and can't be redeemed' the marine echoes critics' incorrect concerns that CRT claims racial progress is impossible.

In addition to being depicted as a threat from within, multiple articles present CRT as an external threat from countries such as China or Russia. These themes appear in the June 11<sup>th</sup> article, 'VA Parent Who Survived Mao: Scholastic Critical Race Indoctrination 'a Replay' of Mao's 'Cultural Revolution'', by Charles Creitz (2021):

"I just want to let the American people know that what is going on in our schools and in our country is really a replay of the cultural revolution in China," she said, calling the similarities "terrifying." "[Critical race theorists] use the same ideology, the same methodology, even the same vocabulary. The ideology is cultural Marxism."

Just as in the previous example, this article quotes an American citizen showing concern over the possible ramifications of CRT. Here, Virginia parent and 'survivor' of Mao's Cultural Revolution, Xi Van Fleet, warns the American people of the 'terrifying' 'ideology' known as critical race theory. In making this comparison to Communist China and Marxism, the author is invoking the anti-Chinese sentiment re-popularized by President Trump as well as Cold War fears of communism taking over the globe (Etzioni 2020). Similar to the previous example, the idea of 'cultural Marxism' invading 'our schools' is a threat to America as a bastion of freedom and democracy. It is also worth noting that both this and the previous example specify the race/ethnicity of the anti-CRT individual. In pointing out that Miyares is Cuban-American and Van Fleet is Chinese-American, the authors portray the anti-CRT movement as multiracial. Interestingly, the CDA articles rarely mention the race of white individuals, thus suggesting the inclusion of anti-CRT voices of colour is more tokenistic than genuine.

Ultimately, there are many negative words used to describe CRT throughout the content analysis articles, but four words— 'radical', 'Marxists', 'evil', and 'threat'—were selected to operationalize the theme of 'CRT as a Threat.'

Does the article refer to CRT as 'radical', 'Marxist', 'evil', or a 'threat'?	How does the article portray CRT?					Total
	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Yes	65%	34.6%	8.3%	20%	0	31.7%
No	35%	65.4%	91.7%	80%	0	68.3%
Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)

Figure 5: Article use of 'threat' by article portrayal of CRT p-value<0.001

As is evident in Figure 5, there is a positive correlation between the use of these words and the article's negative portrayal of CRT. The percentage of articles that employ 'radical', 'Marxist', 'evil', or 'threat' to describe CRT is highest in the 'very negative' category (65%), and lowest in the 'neutral' category (8.3%). However, it is worth noting that since there are only 5 articles total in the 'positive' portrayal of CRT category, the singular article that utilizes these words brings the percentage to 20%. Overall, while these words are used in only 31.7% of the total sample, their existence shows the effort to frame CRT as a threat to America.

#### Pro-CRT Individuals as Threatening

In addition to portraying CRT as a threat to American society, pro-CRT individuals or groups are often depicted as threats to anti-CRT individuals. For instance, the June 29<sup>th</sup> article by Dan Springer (2021) states:

A training session for teachers [...] turned nasty after a White teacher questioned the accuracy and wisdom of linking the trait perfectionism with white supremacy. According to two sources in attendance, the meeting leader used her 90 seconds to berate the White teacher repeatedly and in a raised voice saying she made her feel unsafe. The recipient of the verbal attack, who doesn't want her name used out of fear of retaliation, was instructed to remain silent.

In describing the meeting leader as 'repeatedly and in a raised voice' 'berating' the white teacher for simply asking a question, Springer clearly situates the teacher as a victim in this situation. Furthermore, the implication that there may be 'retaliation' against the teacher and that she was 'instructed to remain silent' (by whom, I might ask?) depicts a situation in which the white teacher is oppressed. It is also noteworthy that while the article quotes the teacher

and provides her perspective of the event, it never provides the perspective of the meeting leader. Finally, while neither the race nor the CRT-views of the meeting leader are explicitly mentioned, the fact that she is running a training session discussing white supremacy, and that she supposedly felt 'unsafe' by the white teacher's comments hints to the reader that she is both pro-CRT and a person of colour. With this in mind, the description of the meeting leader as 'berating' 'repeatedly and in a raised voice' alludes to stereotypes of women of colour as 'shrill, loud, argumentative, irrationally angry, and verbally abusive' (Harris-Perry 2011: 87).

In addition to depicting singular CRT supporters as threatening, the content analysis revealed that Fox News began to depict the Biden White House and the FBI as threatening anti-CRT individuals. After the National School Board Association sent a letter to the Department of Justice asking for help with an increase in violence against teachers and administrators, Fox News and other claims makers began to spread the message that the federal government would start targeting anti-CRT parents.<sup>16</sup> One such example can be found in the November 2<sup>nd</sup> article by Joseph Wulfsohn (2021) that quotes Rufo:

'It's an absolute travesty of a policy. Using the power of the FBI to intimidate parents at local school board meetings [...] You're now setting up a conflict or you're setting up a contradiction between public school mothers and the FBI...And they're not going to let the FBI intimidate them because they care more about their kids than they fear the federal apparatus of repression.'

In describing anti-CRT individuals as 'parents at local school board meetings' and 'public school mothers' who merely 'care about their kids', Rufo portrays the anti-CRT movement as being made up of everyday Americans who simply want what's best for their children and their country. And now, these 'public school mothers' are forced to go up against the 'federal apparatus of repression' who have made it their 'policy' to 'intimidate parents.' Such a depiction, while a wild misrepresentation of events, creates the illusion that there is a government conspiracy in action to ensure the implementation of CRT across the country and to threaten and intimidate anyone that resists.

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<sup>16</sup> While the entire story is quite long, it's worth clarifying that the FBI never said it would intervene at school board meetings and the NSBA ended up rescinding the letter and apologizing.

### Need to Protect Children

As outlined in the theoretical chapter, the innocence of children is often used in moral panics to justify the existence of a true threat. Ibarra and Kitsuse (2017: 40) found that asking the question 'what about the children?' often causes readers to 'extrapolate the worst-case scenario: What a child would 'end up like' were s/he to mature under the tutelage of influence of the pernicious agents.' The fear surrounding the future of children, and thus the future of America, is a clear theme within the CDA sample. The June 29<sup>th</sup> article by Springer once again provides an apt example (2021):

The founder of a new group, Every Black Life Matters, calls the curriculum child abuse. 'They're undermining our children,' says Kevin McGary, an African American IT executive in California. 'They are taking the position as if they have the right to propagandize them, brainwash them and then use them for radical purposes with radical ends.'

McGary seems to follow Ibarra and Kitsuse's assertion: the worst-case scenario is a reality and if it continues, children will become radicalized. In employing words such as 'propagandize' and 'brainwash', McGary alludes to the idea that children are malleable and innocent. He even goes as far as to call the curriculum 'child abuse.'<sup>17</sup> In pointing out McGary's identity as an African American, Springer continues the theme of using people of colour's voices to legitimize anti-CRT ideas. Finally, in attributing these acts to an unspecified 'they', McGary continues the construction of a seemingly conspiratorial plot to radicalize the country.

This idea of purposeful 'brainwashing' appears again in an August 10<sup>th</sup> article by Sam Dorman (2021):

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<sup>17</sup> Even though he does not discuss the racialized aspect of the CRT debate, the organization McGary founded, Every Black Life Matters, provides insight into his views on the subject. This organization was created in July 2020, as a response and counter to the BLM movement. Its guiding principles espouse the ideals of meritocracy and allude to the notion of reverse racism, stating that "as long as there is 'fair play' and transparency, there isn't a need for special privileges because of skin color" (McGary 2020).

## ‘An Existential Threat’

SARAH CAMPBELL

‘School board, I quit,’ she said. Chocking up, she added: ‘I quit your policies, I quit your training, and I quit being a cog in a machine that tells me to push highly politicized agendas to our most vulnerable constituents—children.’

Here, Dorman quotes Virginia teacher, Laura Morris, during her speech at a local school board meeting. In describing Morris as ‘choking up’, Dorman paints an image of emotionality and strength as this (previously established) white woman stands up against ‘the machine’ in defence of ‘vulnerable’ children.

While previous coding of the words ‘radical’, ‘Marxist’, ‘evil’, or ‘threat’, clearly establishes the construction of CRT as a threat to *America*, an additional code examined CRT as a threat to *children*. Words such as ‘propaganda’, ‘brainwashing’, ‘indoctrination’, and ‘ideology’ are used numerous times throughout the content analysis articles to describe the implementation of CRT curriculum in schools.

Does the article refer to CRT as ‘propaganda’, ‘indoctrination/brainwashing’, or an ‘ideology’?	How does the article portray CRT?					Total
	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Yes	75%	48.7%	30.5%	20%	0	46.8%
No	25%	51.3%	69.5%	80%	0	53.2%
Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)

Figure 6: Article use of ‘indoctrination’ by article portrayal of CRT p-value<0.001

As seen in Figure 5, there is a clear positive correlation between the use of these words and the article’s negative portrayal of CRT. The percentage of articles that employ ‘propaganda’, ‘brainwashing’, ‘indoctrination’, and ‘ideology’ to describe CRT’s implementation in school is highest in the ‘very negative’ category (75%), and lowest in the ‘positive’ category (20%). Interestingly, these words are used in 46.8% of the total sample, an increase of 15.1 percentage points from the previous code of ‘radical’, ‘Marxist’, ‘evil’, or ‘threat.’ This finding suggests that the portrayal of CRT as a threat to *children* is even greater than its portrayal as a threat to *America* as a whole.

### Banning CRT

The banning of CRT represents the 'coping and resolution', and 'fade away' stages of Cohen's (2011) moral panic framework as discussed in the literature review. In the case of the CRT debate, the claims makers—Christopher Rufo and other Republicans who champion the anti-CRT movement—propose banning CRT at the school level, state level, and even federal level as the only solution. This coincides with previous research that has found most moral panics culminate in legislative action (Critcher 2003: 141).

### Running for Schoolboard

Given the CRT debates' focus on K-12 schools, many of the articles discuss school boards as sites for local change. Whether it is advocating for anti-CRT parents to run for school board, or simply trying to remove current pro-CRT school board members, this topic proved to be a strong theme throughout the articles. One such example came from the June 8<sup>th</sup> article by Matt Leach (2021):

One section titled "Winning Back Your School Board," reads: "Identify a potential candidate or candidates to run for school board seats that are currently being used to perpetuate the school-sanctioned racism of CRT."

In this article, Leach reports on Citizen's for Renewing America's 'A to Z Guide' for stopping critical race theory.<sup>18</sup> Previously described in the article as an 'advocacy arm' of a larger conservative think tank, this group provides solutions to stop the threat of CRT in schools. In using the phrase 'winning back', this group implies that pro-CRT individuals have taken over schools and school boards, thus perpetuating the idea of an external threat discussed in the previous section. Similarly, in describing CRT as 'school-sanctioned racism', this group constructs a clear image of a 'bad guy' that must be stopped. This theme of labelling CRT as racist will be discussed in depth in the following section.

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<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that Russ Vought, the former director of the Office of Management and Budget under President Trump, launched the Center for Renewing America on January 26, 2020, 6 days after President Biden took office. This connection to the Trump administration explains the close resemblance of the Center's name to Trump's slogan "Make America Great Again."



### Anti-CRT Legislation

In addition to discussing CRT at the school level, many articles include Republican legislatures' plans to implement CRT bans at the state and federal levels. The September 28<sup>th</sup> article by Matt Leach and Joe Schoffstall (2021) provides one such example:

"We are introducing a bill that will make it a civil rights violation to teach critical race theory or anything resembling it by any other name in our schools," Good said of his legislation, the Protecting Students Civil Rights Act. "It is judging students by their race, it's saying that their face determines their future, so we're trying to put a stop to that."

This quote from Republican Bob Good of Virginia is important in three ways. First, his decision to name the bill 'the Protecting Students Civil Rights Act' employs the rhetoric that CRT is a threat to children and that the American people must stop it. Second, saying that CRT is 'judging students by their race' to 'determine their future' hints at the idea that CRT itself is racist and thus needs to be stopped. Finally, stating that this bill will not only ban CRT but 'anything resembling it by any other name' demonstrates that it is not actually CRT that has caused this fear amongst people but rather the generalised racial insecurities that CRT has come to represent.

Overall, 16 (11.5%) of the content analysis articles discuss anti-CRT parents running for school board and 50 (36%) discuss a legislative ban on CRT. Importantly, 58% of the articles that discuss a legislative ban present the idea favourably while only 10% present it unfavourably. This 48-percentage point difference is significant as it further demonstrates Fox News' slant against CRT.

How does the article present the idea of banning CRT?	How does the article portray CRT?					Total
	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Unfavourably	0%	0%	6.7%	80%	0	10%
Neutrally	0%	12%	80%	20%	0	32%
Favourably	100%	88%	13.3%	0%	0	58%
Total	100% (5)	100% (25)	100% (15)	100% (5)	0	100% (50)

Figure 7: Article portrayal of banning CRT by article portrayal of CRT p-value<0.001

Similarly, as seen in Figure 7, there is a distinct correlation between the positive portrayal of banning CRT and the article’s negative overall portrayal of CRT. The percentage of articles that favourably discuss banning CRT is highest in the ‘very negative’ category (100%), and lowest in the ‘positive’ category (0%). Conversely, articles that discuss the banning of CRT unfavourably did so in 80% of the ‘positive’ category and 0% in the ‘very negative’ category. These statistics, along with the findings from the CDA, demonstrate a clear message that banning CRT is the only way to stop the ‘evils’ it brings.

### CRT as Racist

In addition to framing CRT as a threat and advocating for its banning – as lines up with moral panic frameworks – there is a clear racial tone to the debate. In fact, CRT itself is deemed racist numerous times throughout the CDA articles. Xi Van Fleet, the parent who discusses CRT’s links to the Chinese cultural revolution in Creitz’s (2021) June 11<sup>th</sup> article, is quoted as saying, “Critical race theory is not antiracism. It itself is racist. It is divisive, destructive and it is dangerous.”

Does the article refer to CRT as racist?	How does the article portray CRT?					Total
	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Yes	55%	20.5%	2.8%	20%	0	20.9%
No	45%	79.5%	97.2%	80%	0	79.1%
Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)

Figure 8: Article use of 'racist' by article portrayal of CRT p-value<0.001

As is evident in Figure 8, there is a positive correlation between the description of CRT as racist and the article's overall negative portrayal of CRT. The percentage of articles that refer to CRT as racist is highest in the 'very negative' category (55%), and lowest in the 'neutral' category (2.8%). More often than not, CDA revealed that these claims of racism are made not because of the negative impacts on people of colour, but because of the perceived negative impacts on white people.

#### Negative Impacts of CRT on White People

While not a direct claim of racism, Dorman (2021) quotes Virginia teacher Laura Morris in his August 10<sup>th</sup> article, 'Virginia Teacher Resigns at School Board Meeting, Denounces 'Highly Politicized Agendas'':

'I was [told] in one of my so-called equity trainings that White, Christian, able-bodied females currently have the power in our school and 'this has to change' [...] 'Clearly, you've made your point. You no longer value me or many other teachers you've employed in this county.'

In saying 'so-called equity trainings' Morris denounces equity trainings (read: CRT) and implies that they espouse inequity. She then accuses the school board of 'no longer valuing' her and other 'White, Christian, able-bodied females'. The jump that Morris makes from being told that a single racial demographic (white people) should not hold all power within a school to claiming that she is no longer valued in the county is an exaggeration to say the least. Such claims coincide with sentiments of white aggrievement—'a belief system that argues, against

all existing evidence, that white people are subject to systematic racial oppression' (King 2015: 92).

The findings from the content analysis similarly depict this pattern of white aggrievement. In total, 37 articles (26.6%) discussed the perceived negative impacts of CRT on white people. In addition to examples such as the one above, many of these instances revolved around the idea that white children were meant to feel shame over the 'sins of our past' (Leach and Schoffstall 2021).

Does the article discuss any negative impacts of CRT on white people?	How does the article portray CRT?					Total
	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Yes	50%	21.8%	22.2%	40%	0	26.6%
No	50%	78.2%	77.8%	60%	0	73.4%
Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)

Figure 9: Article discussion of negative impacts by article portrayal of CRT p-value<0.05

Interestingly, as Figure 9 depicts, the correlation between discussions of the negative impacts of CRT on white people and the overall negative portrayal of CRT was weaker than the previous crosstabs. While 'very negative' articles are still the most likely to discuss negative impacts (50%), there is less than 1-percentage point difference between 'negative' and 'neutral' articles, and 'positive' articles discuss negative impacts 40% of the time. This more even spread across all depictions of CRT demonstrates the general validity of such rhetoric among right-wing Americans as established in the literature review.

Links to Reverse-Discrimination

In addition to general claims of negative impacts on white people, there is a theme of more explicit calls of reverse racism within the CDA sample. One such example appears in Tyler O'Neil's (2021) November 1<sup>st</sup> article:

'Terry McAuliffe has said out loud what we as parents have been noticing since June 2020 [...] State educrats and local school boards are using the excuse of 'equity' and 'diversity' to bring race-based discrimination and racial balancing to our school

districts, from the way they are hiring teachers and staff for schools to the process by which they are selecting students [...] It's a new racism of judging people by the color of their skin, not evaluating them based on merit. We must reject this new racism.'

In this excerpt, O'Neil quotes Asara Nomani, a mother and vice president of Parents Defending Education.<sup>19</sup> Nomani connects the beginning of this 'issue' to June 2020, the start of the 2020 BLM protests. Claiming that equity and diversity are guises for 'race-based discrimination' and a 'new racism' works to undermine the goals of CRT. Interestingly, this 'new racism' — 'judging people by the color of their skin' — has in fact always been the definition of racism.<sup>20</sup> The only difference is that Nomani, and others like her, view 'equity' and 'diversity' as discrimination against white people. Claiming new definitions of racism in this way not only harms efforts for racial justice, but 'fundamentally erodes the political and discursive space upon which actual, materialist claims about racial inequality can even be coherently expressed' (King 2015: 92).

### Calls for Colour-blindness and Meritocracy

The final notable theme that emerged from the CDA was the espousal of meritocracy and colour-blindness over the teachings of CRT. Interestingly, Martin Luther King Jr. was often quoted as a way to justify the discreditation of CRT, saying that he stood for 'judging people by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin' (Leach and Schoffstall 2021). In total, MLK is referenced in 7 of the content analysis articles to justify anti-CRT sentiment. He, of course, is not the only Black voice used to rationalise the ideals of meritocracy and colour-blindness. Bob Woodson, a 'civil rights veteran'<sup>21</sup> was quoted in O'Neil's (2021) November 1<sup>st</sup> article:

'Everything he says echoes critical race theory [...] It automatically operates on the assumption that the most important aspect of our lives is race.' Woodson said that

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<sup>19</sup> This group was founded specifically to combat CRT in education. For a comprehensive list of anti-CRT organizations see APPENDIX G.

<sup>20</sup> While not verbatim, the Oxford English Dictionary defines racism as "prejudice, antagonism, or discrimination [...] against a person or people on the basis of their [...] particular racial or ethnic group", aka judging people by the colour of their skin (OED 2022).

<sup>21</sup> The fact that Woodson is a civil rights veteran is mentioned a total of 5 times in this single article.

a good education program 'has nothing to do with the color of the teacher or the color of the student. It has to do with the presence of excellence.'

Here, Woodson condemns then-Virginia gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe's plan to diversify Virginia's public-school teachers by incentivising people of colour to apply.<sup>22</sup> In claiming that a good education only relies on the 'presence of excellence', Woodson perpetuates the idea that one can achieve anything if they try hard enough. Similarly, in stating that the 'color of the teacher' and 'the color of the student' do not matter, Woodson echoes rhetoric advocating for colour-blindness as discussed in the literature review.

### Answering the Hypotheses

Ultimately, these findings confirm the three hypotheses as laid out in the theoretical chapter:

H1: The more critical of Critical Race Theory, the more likely the article will present it as a threat to America.

- There is a positive correlation between the use of the words 'radical', 'Marxist', 'evil', or 'threat' to describe CRT and the article's negative portrayal of CRT (p-value<0.001).
- There is a positive correlation between the use of the words 'propaganda', 'brainwashing', 'indoctrination', and 'ideology' and the article's negative portrayal of CRT (p-value<0.001).

H2: The more critical of Critical Race Theory, the more likely the article will support the banning of CRT in education.

- There is a positive correlation between the suggestion of banning CRT and the article's negative overall portrayal of CRT (p-value<0.05).<sup>23</sup>
- There is a positive correlation between the positive portrayal of banning CRT and the article's negative overall portrayal of CRT (p-value<0.001).

H3: The more critical of Critical Race Theory, the more likely the article will employ rhetoric of reverse-discrimination or white victimhood.

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<sup>22</sup> McAuliffe ultimately lost to his Republican, anti-CRT opponent, Glenn Youngkin.

<sup>23</sup> See APPENDIX F for table.

- There is positive correlation between the description of CRT as racist and the article's overall negative portrayal of CRT (p-value<0.001).
- There is a positive correlation between discussions of the negative impacts of CRT on white people and the overall negative portrayal of CRT (p-value<0.05).

### CONCLUSION

This project set out to determine if the right-wing media coverage of critical race theory in K-12 schools constituted the newest racialized moral panic in the United States. It did so through content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis of Fox News articles published between September 2020 and December 2021. The case study not only examined the criteria of moral panics in relation to the CRT debate, but also sought to reveal the many racial undertones of the debate by using tenets of critical race theory as a lens of analysis.

Overall, the project demonstrated that the debate surrounding critical race theory has met various criteria of moral panics as laid out by Cohen (2011). The content analysis and CDA found that media coverage of the debate increased suddenly and sharply; the anti-CRT side was championed by prominent claims makers such as Rufo; CRT was established as a threat to America and to children in particular; and solutions of legislative action were suggested and implemented. On the surface, these findings establish the clear moral panic trajectory of the CRT debate. On a subtler level, references to BLM protests, the use of people of colour's voices to justify anti-CRT ideas, the framing of white people as victims of CRT, and the evocation of meritocracy and colour-blindness demonstrated the racialized aspect of the panic.

While many of these findings have proven to be statistically significant and thus representative of Fox News coverage as a whole, it would be advantageous for future studies to examine a broader array of right-wing media sources in order to determine general consensus among this segment of American society. Similarly, re-examining this project a year or two from now would provide a fuller picture of the resolution and legacy stages of Cohen's

## **'An Existential Threat'**

SARAH CAMPBELL

framework, as the CRT panic will presumably have ended given the short attention span of the news media (Critchler 2003: 139). It would also be interesting to create a study based on Fairclough's (2013) recommendation to examine the 'recontextualization of discourse' across different fields and different levels of American society. The numerous organizations created to combat CRT in schools was a fascinating realization of this study and examining how their language mirrors the language of prominent anti-CRT individuals would provide a fuller picture of the moral panic.

Ultimately, this is only the first of what I hope will be many scholarly articles about the racialised moral panic surrounding CRT in K-12 schools in the US. It is my understanding that, in agreeance with King's (2015: 88) previous case study, this racialized moral panic 'shines a concentrated spotlight onto the state of race relations in 'post-racial' America' and 'allows us to identify and conceptualize the lines of power' within American society (Cohen 2011). Unfortunately, even after this panic subsides, the legislation implemented to ban the teaching of CRT and anything that resembles it could have dire ramifications for the future of racial equity in the United States.



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## 'An Existential Threat'

SARAH CAMPBELL

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## APPENDIX A: FINAL CONTENT ANALYSIS CODEBOOK

### Coder Training:

*Critical Race Theory Definition: In Critical Race Theory: An Introduction, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic identify the four basic tenets of critical race theory: (1) racism is an ordinary aspect of everyday life; (2) the often-liberal ideals of "color blindness," "objectivity," and "meritocracy" are harmful in anti-racist projects; (3) race and racism are products of social thought and are thus specific to historic and geographic context; and (4) the "experiential knowledge of people of color" is imperative to the study of law and society (2017: 9). While CRT can be applied to a multitude of different contexts, its ultimate goal is to expose the relationship between law/institutions and racial power.*

*Pro-CRT or Anti-CRT: When deciding if someone is pro-CRT or anti-CRT simply code based on how the article presents the individual/group. There are many individuals that deny CRT is being taught in school which does not necessarily mean they are pro-CRT, but for the purposes of Fox News these people are pro-CRT because they are not anti-CRT. Similarly, there are a few people that should always be read as anti-CRT: Donald Trump; Christopher Rufo; Glenn Youngkin. And a few people that should be read as pro-CRT: Terry McAuliffe; Joe Biden; Ibram X Kendi.*

### Background Information:

1. ID Number
2. Headline of article
3. Date of publication [day/month/year]
4. Author

### Stance on Critical Race Theory:

5. Does the article provide a perspective from pro-CRT individuals/groups about the CRT debate (quotes or opinions from someone other than the writer(s))?
  1. Yes
  2. No
6. Does the article provide a perspective from anti-CRT individuals/groups about the CRT debate (quotes or opinions from someone other than the writer(s))?
  1. Yes
  2. No
7. Does the article take its own stance on CRT?
  1. Yes, the article makes its own moral claims in favour of CRT
  2. Yes, the article makes its own moral claims against CRT
  3. No, the article simply discusses other's views
  4. No, the article simply mentions CRT in passing

8. On a scale of 1-5 how does the article portray CRT overall?
  1. Very positive
  2. Positive
  3. Neutral
  4. Negative
  5. Very negative
  
9. Are the following words used to describe/used in conjunction with CRT?
  - a. Divisive/division/divides (etc.)
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - b. Propaganda
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - c. Indoctrination/brainwashing
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - d. Controversial
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - e. Ideology/Doctrine
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - f. Racist/racism (etc.)
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - g. Evil
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - h. Threat/harmful/destructive
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - i. Marxist/Socialist
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - j. Important/good
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - k. Helpful/improve
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - l. Radical
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - m. Woke
    1. Yes
    2. No

**Definition of Critical Race Theory:**

10. Does the article define critical race theory?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  
11. On a scale of 1-4 how accurate is this definition?
  1. In depth/accurate definition
  2. Partially accurate definition
  3. Inaccurate or misleading definition
  4. Very inaccurate definition
  
12. Who does the article associate pro-CRT individuals with? [can be more than one]
  1. Academics (professors or scholars)
  2. K-12 Teachers
  3. Parents
  4. Schools/school boards/administrations
  5. Left-wing/progressive politicians/ activists/ groups (or democrat party)
  6. Right-wing/conservative politicians/activists/ groups (or republican party)
  7. Students/children
  8. None of the above
  
13. How are these people depicted? [can be more than one]
  1. Discredited, too extreme
  2. Discredited, liar/deceitful
  3. Discredited, illogical/buffoon
  4. Neutral
  5. Reliable, average citizen
  6. Reliable, deemed an expert
  7. Reliable, depicted as admirable/heroes/fighting for rights
  
14. Who does the article associate anti-CRT individuals with? [can be more than one]
  1. Academics (professors or scholars)
  2. K-12 Teachers
  3. Parents
  4. Schools/school boards/administrations
  5. Left-wing/progressive politicians/ activists/ groups (or democrat party)
  6. Right-wing/conservative politicians/activists/ groups (or republican party)
  7. Students/children
  8. None of the above
  
15. How are these people depicted? [can be more than one]
  1. Discredited, too extreme
  2. Discredited, liar/deceitful
  3. Discredited, illogical/buffoon
  4. Neutral
  5. Reliable, average citizen
  6. Reliable, deemed an expert
  7. Reliable, depicted as admirable/heroes/ fighting for rights

16. Are any of the following specific people mentioned?

1. Ibram X. Kendi
2. Christopher Rufo
3. Donald Trump
4. None of the above

**White Victimhood**

17. Does the article discuss anti-CRT individuals/groups being silenced (implied or explicit)?

1. Yes
2. No

18. Does the article discuss any negative implications of CRT on white children?

1. Yes
2. No

19. Does the article discuss the idea that white Americans are discriminated against (either explicitly or implied)?

1. Yes
2. No

20. Does the article link CRT to the teaching/dismantling of white privilege, white supremacy, or white fragility?

1. Yes
2. No

21. Does the article (implicitly or explicitly) imply that white people are encouraged to feel shame over their whiteness?

1. Yes
2. No

22. Does the article mention/refer to the following things in addition to CRT?

a. MLK (or other civil rights activists)

1. Yes
2. No

b. George Floyd

1. Yes
2. No

c. Defund the Police

1. Yes
2. No

d. BLM (or racial protest)

1. Yes
2. No

e. ANTIFA

1. Yes
2. No

f. 1619 Project

1. Yes



2. No

**Banning of Critical Race Theory**

22. Does the article discuss the banning of CRT? (trying to stop, ending, etc.)
  1. Yes
  2. No
23. How does the article present the idea of banning of CRT?
  1. Favourably
  2. Neutrally
  3. Unfavourably
24. Does the article discuss anti-CRT parents running for school board?
  1. Yes
  2. No

**Critical Race Theory as a Threat**

25. Does the article associate CRT with anti-Americanism or hating America?
  1. Anti-America
  2. Hate America
  3. Neither
26. Are pro-CRT individuals/groups depicted as threatening or physically towards anti-CRT individuals?
  1. Yes
  2. No
27. Are democrats or pro-CRT individuals/groups depicted as lying or deceptive about the implementation of CRT in schools?
  1. Yes
  2. No
30. Are the following words used when discussing anti-racists/CRT advocates or the CRT debate in general?
  - a. Infiltrate
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - b. War
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - c. Fight
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - d. Army
    1. Yes
    2. No
  - e. Cult
    1. Yes
    2. No

**APPENDIX B: INTER-CODER RELIABILITY RESULTS**

Inter-coder reliability for original codebook:

Question	ICR Percent	Question	ICR Percent	Question	ICR Percent	Question	ICR Percent
Q1	100%	Q9e	100%	Q13	35.71%	Q23	85.71%
Q2	100%	Q9f	85.71%	Q14	78.57%	Q24	92.86%
Q3	100%	Q9g	100%	Q15	21.43%	Q25	100%
Q4	100%	Q9h	100%	Q16	92.86%	Q26	92.86%
Q5	92.86%	Q9i	100%	Q17	100%	Q27	100%
Q6	78.57%	Q9j	100%	Q18	92.86%	Q28	92.86%
Q7	92.86%	Q9k	100%	Q19	92.86%	Q29	57.14%
Q8	71.43%	Q9l	100%	Q20	100%	Q30a	85.71%
Q9a	85.71%	Q9m	85.71%	Q21a	92.86%	Q30b	100%
Q9b	92.86%	Q10	92.86%	Q21b	100%	Q30c	92.86%
Q9c	100%	Q11	78.57%	Q21c	100%	Q30d	100%
Q9d	85.71%	Q12	21.43%	Q22	100%	Q30e	100%

Inter-coder reliability for revised codebook:

Question	ICR Percent	Question	ICR Percent	Question	ICR Percent	Question	ICR Percent
Q1	100%	Q9e	100%	Q13	92.86%	Q23	85.71%
Q2	100%	Q9f	85.71%	Q14	85.71%	Q24	92.86%
Q3	100%	Q9g	100%	Q15	85.71%	Q25	100%
Q4	100%	Q9h	100%	Q16	92.86%	Q26	92.86%
Q5	92.86%	Q9i	100%	Q17	100%	Q27	100%
Q6	100.00%	Q9j	100%	Q18	92.86%	Q28	92.86%
Q7	92.86%	Q9k	100%	Q19	92.86%	Q29	92.86%
Q8	85.71%	Q9l	100%	Q20	100%	Q30a	85.71%
Q9a	85.71%	Q9m	85.71%	Q21a	92.86%	Q30b	100%
Q9b	92.86%	Q10	92.86%	Q21b	100%	Q30c	92.86%
Q9c	100%	Q11	85.71%	Q21c	100%	Q30d	100%
Q9d	85.71%	Q12	85.71%	Q22	100.00%	Q30e	100%

**APPENDIX C: BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CDA TEXTS**

- Betz, Bradford, and Murray, A. (2021) Rhode Island Teacher Goes Public with Critical Race Theory Curriculum: 'I'm Refusing to Propagate Lies.', *Fox News*, July 15.
- Creitz, C. (2021) VA Parent Who Survived Mao: Scholastic Critical Race Indoctrination 'a Replay' of Mao's 'Cultural Revolution.', *Fox News*, June 11.
- Dorman, S. (2021a) Kansas Lawmaker Promoting 'radical' Publisher with Critical Race Theory Resources, *Fox News*, August 5.
- Dorman, S. (2021b) Virginia Teacher Resigns at School Board Meeting, Denounces 'Highly Politicized Agendas.', *Fox News*, August 10.
- Leach, M. (2021) Conservative Think Tank Creates 'A to Z Guide' for Stopping Critical Race Theory in Schools, *Fox News*, June 8.
- Leach, M. and Schoffstall, J. (2021) Legislation Aims to Make Teaching CRT in Federally Funded Schools a Civil Rights Violation, *Fox News*, September 28.
- O'Neil, T. (2021) Civil Rights Leader Condemns McAuliffe's Race-Based Teacher Plan as 'racist' and 'Insulting.', *Fox News*, November 1.
- Ruiz, M. and Murray, A (2021) Virginia Republicans Raise Alarms after Radical Left, Democrats Team up in 'let Them Die' pro-CRT Rally, *Fox News*, July 25.
- Springer, D. (2021) Portland Begins Anti-Racist Teacher Training, Source Says, *Fox News*, June 29.
- Wulfsohn, J. (2021) Christopher Rufo Says the Fiery Education Debate Will Go Far beyond Virginia, *Fox News*, November 2.

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE OF ANNOTATED CDA TEXT

- Pronouns
- Word choice
- Social
- Dialogic words
- Discursive

Sample 59:

white male reporter based in C.A. and white male senior political editor based in NY.

Rhode Island teacher goes public with critical race theory curriculum: 'I'm refusing to propagate lies'

By Bradford Betz, Andrew Murray  
Published July 15, 2021

Fox News -> very popular conservative News Source

liberals as lying or sneaky

A Rhode Island middle school teacher says critical race theory is finding its way into public school classrooms and creating racial hostility and mistrust among her students.

racism wasn't a problem before -> post-racial

Ramona Bessinger has been a public school teacher for more than two decades. For the past seven years, she's been a middle school teacher in Providence. She currently teaches at Esek Hopkins Middle School. Over the years, Bessinger says her lessons have been diverse, running the gamut from poems by Maya Angelou to speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr. She's also taught units on slavery and the Harlem Renaissance, she said.

This is how it's always been done -> yearning for simpler times

American exceptionalism -> US Patriotism

"I consider the American story one of triumph," Bessinger told Fox News in an interview. "People overcome things ... We are victorious. We are like the greatest nation on the planet. I feel very proud to be an American. And what is unique about this country is that we're diverse and we have cultural diversity. Maybe it's not perfect. It's there. And previous books that we had in the classroom represented that."

self-described conservative website

But Bessinger, who wrote about her experiences for Legal Insurrection, said there was an "alarming" shift that took place during the 2020-2021 school year regarding the implementation of a new, racially focused curriculum. Around January, she received boxes of new books for her classroom.

reference to post-BLM protests

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing there, there were cartoon booklets, you know, all sort of sharing the same narrative," Bessinger said.

(Caption: The fairytale of Jack and the Beanstalk retold with African American Jack and an evil White giant)

Books on pivotal moments in American history, for example, the American Revolution or the Civil War, all essentially came down to "somebody being aggressive or somebody oppressing somebody else."

CRT as false representation of American history

Bessinger said any one of these books wouldn't necessarily have been an issue on their own, but they are the only books her students are supposed to read.

liberal ideals being mandated

(Caption: Reading material from Bessinger's classroom, depicting fear of White oppression)

attack on freedom of speech



# 'An Existential Threat'

SARAH CAMPBELL

US patriotism

"That is **problematic** because, yes, it is a part of our history. We're not a perfect nation historically, but **we're pretty darn close to it**," Bessinger said. "We were teaching slavery. We were teaching the civil rights movement prior to all of this. **Now, these books basically are suggesting to children that this is the only narrative that defines America.**"

America as post racial

(Caption: **Whites as aggressors** is a running theme in many of the books assigned in the new curriculum)

Bessinger's comments come amid **nationwide concerns** that critical race theory, a school of thought focusing on how power structures and institutions **impact** racial minorities, is being taught in classrooms. Liberal pundits and teacher unions, meanwhile, **have either downplayed or contradicted that notion.**

liberals as being sneaking or lying

(Caption: A book showing a killer tiger formed from a White woman)

Bessinger clarified that "critical race theory" is not mentioned anywhere in the new curriculum, but said its **"tenets" are implied** in all of the lessons.

"The CRT theory is reflected in the novelettes and the booklets and the projects and the storylines and themes," Bessinger said.

Her students are almost entirely all African American or **Hispanic**. Bessinger, who is White, said she could sense a **mistrust of her as their teacher**. By the end of the year, some students were calling her "America" or asking her if she lived in a castle.

"There was a bizarre fear of me, right? So, that made me very sad because **I feel** that, as educators ... **we really care about our students**," she said. "We care that the kids feel good and welcome and (that) **they feel they are Americans** and part of **our tradition and our heritage**. Not that **they are part of one camp and I am in another.**"

America as melting pot

Bessinger said there is a **nervous tension** that pervades her school and among her colleagues. Many have **privately expressed their opposition** to the new curriculum but are **too afraid to speak out for fear of being labeled a racist.**

creator of CRT

"I'm refusing to **propagate lies**. I can't do that as a parent and as a teacher. I simply cannot do that. So let the cards fall where they may," she said. "I mean, **what kind of a human being would I be** if I simply went along with this and **buried my head in the sand**? What kind of a **mother** would I be? What kind of an **educator** would I be? So, no, **I have no choice but to go public.**"

Fox News has reached out to Providence Public Schools seeking comment.

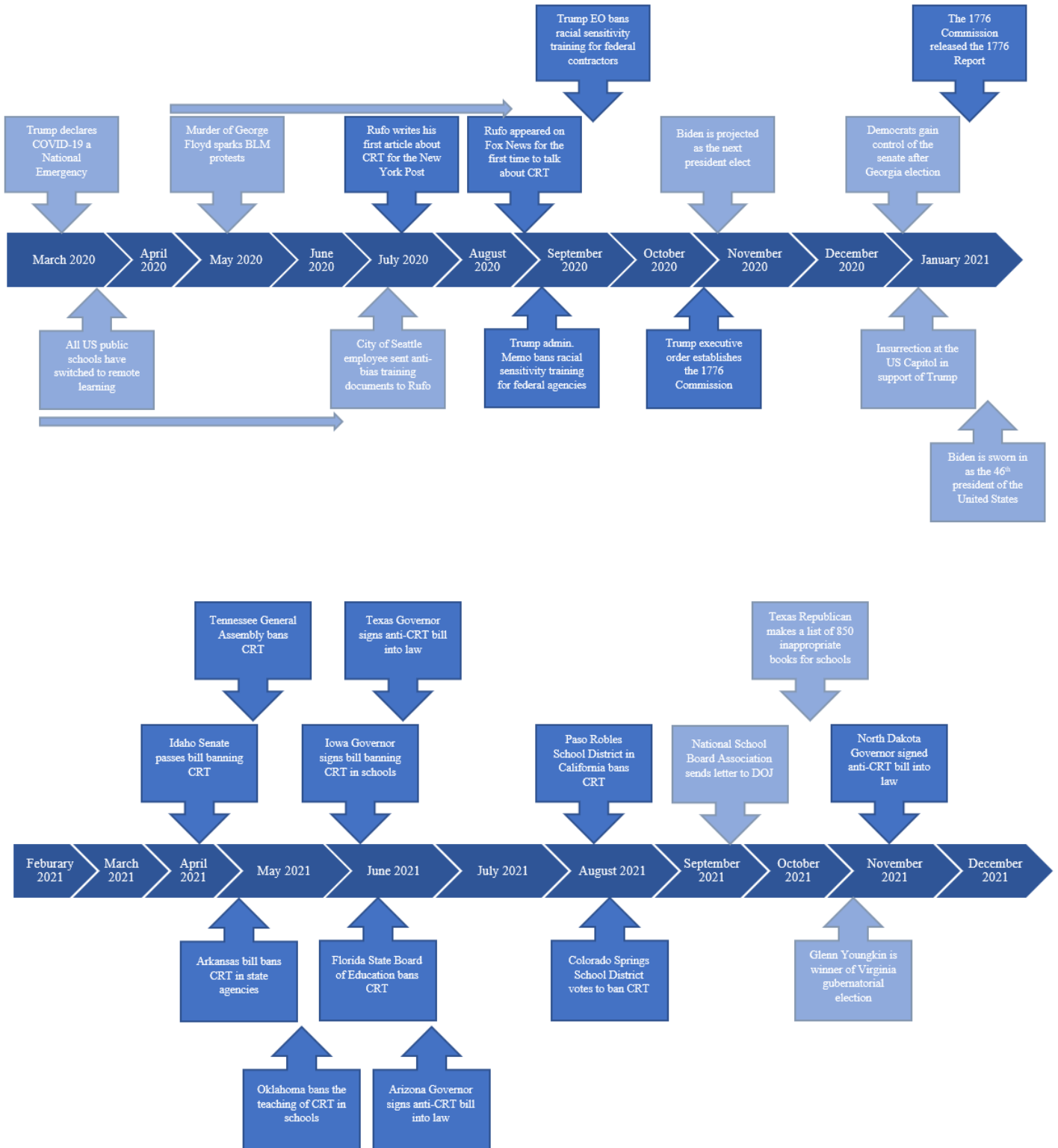
False representation of American History

importance of kids

here standing up for what is right

APPENDIX E: CONTEXTUAL TIMELINE

- Contextual Information
- Critical Race Theory Information



**APPENDIX F: ADDITIONAL CHARTS**

Does the article provide the perspective of anti/pro-CRT individuals or groups?		How does the article portray CRT?					Total
		Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Anti-CRT*	Yes	90%	92.3%	83.3%	40%	0	87.8%
	No	10%	7.7%	16.7%	60%	0	12.2%
	Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)
Pro-CRT**	Yes	10%	37.2%	66.7%	100%	0	43.2%
	No	90%	62.8%	33.3%	0%	0	56.8%
	Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)

Figure 10: Article perspective of pro/anti CRT individuals by article portrayal of CRT

\*p-value<0.001

\*\*p-value<0.01

How does the article portray anti/pro-CRT individuals or groups?		How does the article portray CRT?					Total
		Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Anti-CRT	Unreliable	0%	2.6%	8.3%	40%	0	5%
	Neutral	15%	25.6%	41.7%	60%	0	29.5%
	Reliable	85%	71.8%	50%	0%	0	65.5%
	Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)
Pro-CRT	Unreliable	95%	76.9%	55.6%	0%	0	71.3%
	Neutral	0%	19.3%	33.3%	40%	0	20.8%
	Reliable	5%	3.8%	11.1%	60%	0	7.9%
	Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)

Figure 11: Article portrayal of pro/anti CRT individuals by article portrayal of CRT

\*p-value<0.001

# 'An Existential Threat'

SARAH CAMPBELL

Does the article mention banning CRT?	How does the article portray CRT?					Total
	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Yes	25%	32.1%	41.7%	100%	0	36.0%
No	75%	67.9%	58.3%	0%	0	64.0%
Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)

Figure 12: Article mention of CRT ban by article portrayal of CRT

p-value<0.01

Does the article use the words "war", "fight", or "army" to describe the CRT debate?	How does the article portray CRT?					Total
	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Yes	55%	29.5%	13.9%	40%	0	29.5%
No	45%	70.5%	86.1%	60%	0	70.5%
Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)

Figure 13: Article use of "war" by article portrayal of CRT

p-value<0.01

Does the article connect CRT with ending white privilege?	How does the article portray CRT?					Total
	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	
Yes	30%	21.8%	5.6%	0%	0	18.0%
No	70%	78.2%	94.4%	100%	0	82.0%
Total	100% (20)	100% (78)	100% (36)	100% (5)	0	100% (139)

Figure 14: Article connection to white privilege by article portrayal of CRT

p-value<0.05



## APPENDIX G: LIST OF ANTI-CRT ORGANIZATIONS

In June 2021 NBC reported there were a staggering 165 local and national groups dedicated to stopping critical race theory in schools. This list is just a preview of some of the organizations mentioned in the content analysis for this project.

Parents Defending Education: <https://defendinged.org/>

Parents Defending Education is a national grassroots organization working to reclaim our schools from activists promoting harmful agendas. Through network and coalition building, investigative reporting, litigation, and engagement on local, state, and national policies, we are fighting indoctrination in the classroom -- and for the restoration of a healthy, non-political education for our kids.

Every Black Life Matters: <https://everyblm.com/crt-resources/>

A “just” response to injustices gripping America must begin with an embrace of life (all life in the womb), then an embrace of intentional impartiality. This means, we reject nomenclature and movements that separate and divide us (i.e. “White Fragility,” “1619 project,” and the like); all these movements support wanton racist abortions targeting the Black community, and they further foment injustice by pitting one ethnicity against another based on degree of melanin in the skin. Notably, this is grossly unjust!

Critical Race Training in Education: <https://criticalrace.org/>

In order to understand the problem of Critical Race Training in Higher Education, parents and students need to understand what Critical Race Theory is and how it is implemented. As discussed below, Critical Race Theory is not the traditional civil rights movement, which sought to provide equal opportunity and dignity without regard to race. Rather, Critical Race Theory, and the training to implement it, is a radical ideology that focuses on race as the key to understanding society, and objectifies people based on race.

Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR): <https://www.fairforall.org/about/>

Increasingly, American institutions—colleges and universities, businesses, government, the media and even our children’s schools—are enforcing a cynical and intolerant orthodoxy. This orthodoxy requires us to identify ourselves and each other based on immutable characteristics like skin color, gender, and sexual orientation. It pits us against one another, and diminishes what it means to be human.

Heritage Action for America: <https://heritageaction.com/toolkit/rejectcrt>

Critical race theory (CRT) makes race the lens through which its proponents analyze all aspects of American life. CRT underpins identity politics, an ongoing effort to reimagine the United States as a nation driven by racial groups, each with specific claims on victimization. Ultimately, CRT weakens the public and private bonds that create trust and allow for civic engagement

Nevada Family Alliance: <https://www.reclaimingourschools.com/>

Critical Race Theory is nearly EVERYWHERE in the New Curriculum. The Washoe County School District allowed the citizens of Washoe County to have a very limited glance of the proposed social justice curriculum for grades K-5 last month. Board President Dr. Angela Taylor has vehemently denied the Benchmark Advance curriculum contains ANY aspects of Critical Race Theory. Clearly, Dr. Taylor has not viewed the curriculum, or she does not know what Critical Race Theory is.

No Left Turn in Education: <https://www.noleftturn.us/>

We are a national grassroots movement of common-sense parents and community members from diverse backgrounds, building generational integrity through education free from indoctrination. We believe that K-12 education should be free from indoctrination and politicization. Radical teachings motivated by a political agenda and deliberately spread by teachers, administrators, school board members, and even state officials have infiltrated schools across the nation. Unfortunately, all too often words such as diversity, equity, inclusion, social justice, systemic racism, human rights education, and health education concealed an aggressive, radical totalitarian ideology. From The 1619 Project to Critical Race Theory, to Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), the goal is to overturn our society by sowing divisiveness and hate. The social unrest that erupted in May 2020 provided the perfect cover for a complete assault and takeover of our educational system. Aided by the mainstream media, the teachers' unions, together with an increasing number of educators and administrators have become the true schoolyard bullies, using taxpayer funds to indoctrinate their captive audience – our children.

Free to Learn Coalition: <https://freetolearn.org/mission/>

New programs are being implemented as early as Kindergarten, priming young minds to think in accordance with a particular ideology rather than fostering curiosity, questions, experimentation, and growth. Rather than teaching the next generation to think critically – to formulate and defend their own opinions and beliefs – activist curriculum shut down dissenting opinions, shaming and ostracizing students who won't conform. There is also an unfortunate trend of schools changing or eliminating merit-based, accelerated learning programs. Dismantling such programs ensures that the only students who will excel long term are those who can afford a private education, tutoring, or specialized extracurricular programs. Schools should be free of curriculum and programs driven by political activists, and instead make space for children to do what they do best – learn, grow, and create.

Moms for Liberty: <https://www.momsforliberty.org/>

Moms for Liberty welcomes all that have a desire to stand up for parental rights at all levels of government. Our founders are Tiffany and Tina, moms on a mission to stoke the fires of liberty. As former school board members, they witnessed how short-sighted and destructive policies directly hurt children and families. Now they are using their first-hand knowledge and experience to unite parents who are ready to fight those that stand in the way of liberty. Moms for Liberty is dedicated to fighting for the survival of America by unifying, educating and empowering parents to defend their parental rights at all levels of government.

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