



BANNING BOOKS IS UN-AMERICAN

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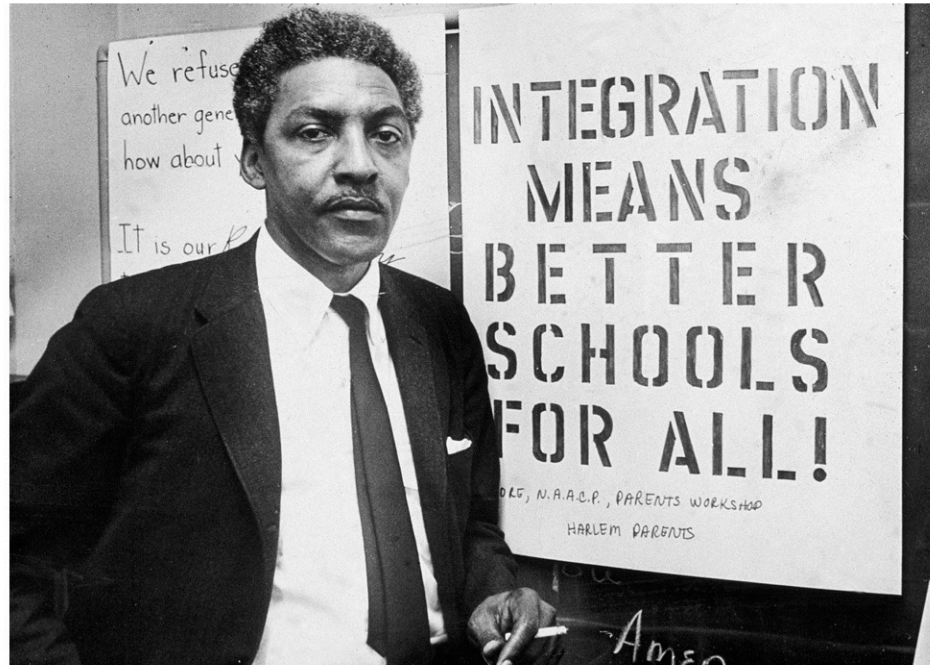
“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Letter from Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King Jr.



This rigid refusal to look at ourselves may well destroy us; particularly now since if we cannot understand ourselves we will not be able to understand anything.

**James Baldwin
“Lockridge: ‘The American Myth’”**



“When an individual is protesting society's refusal to acknowledge his dignity as a human being, his very act of protest confers dignity on him.”

“The proof that one truly believes is in action.”

“To be afraid is to behave as if the truth were not true...”

Bayard Rustin

“We know of course there’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”

Arundhati Roy: [The 2004 Sydney Peace Prize lecture](#)

“The matrix of a poet’s work consists not only of what is there to be absorbed and worked on, but also of what is missing, **desaparecido**, rendered unspeakable, thus unthinkable. It is through these invisible holes in reality that poetry makes its way—certainly for women and other marginalized subjects and for disempowered and colonized peoples generally, but ultimately for all who practice art at any deep levels. The impulse to create begins—often terribly and fearfully—in a tunnel of silence.”

Adrienne Rich: [“Arts of the Possible”](#)

Ground Zero

- Trump + Rufo = anti-CRT legislation (Fall 2020)
- [Christopher Rufo and the Critical Race Theory Moral Panic](#)
- [Should South Carolina Ban Critical Race Theory and the 1619 Project?](#)
- [Critical race theory, and Trump's war on it, explained](#)

Ground Zero

- CRT/1619 Project bans - attacks on DEI and acknowledging systemic racism
- Education gag orders - discomfort, divisive
- Parental trigger legislation (VA)

“CRT” and “The Conflict Campaign”

- [The Conflict Campaign: Exploring Local Experiences of the Campaign to Ban “Critical Race Theory” in Public K-12 Education in the U.S., 2020-2021](#)

*“We found that **at least 894 school districts, enrolling 17,743,850 students, or 35% of all K-12 students in the United States, have been impacted by local anti ‘CRT’ efforts.** Our survey and interviews demonstrate how such restriction efforts have been experienced inside schools as well as districts. We found that both state action and local activity have left many educators afraid to do their work.”*

“CRT” and “The Conflict Campaign”

- [The Conflict Campaign: Exploring Local Experiences of the Campaign to Ban “Critical Race Theory” in Public K-12 Education in the U.S., 2020-2021](#)

“We put ‘CRT’ in quotation marks throughout this report because so often the conflict campaign’s definition of ‘CRT’ (like its description of actual K-12 practice) is a caricatured distortion by loud opponents as self-appointed ‘experts.’ **The conflict campaign thrives on caricature** — on often distorting altogether both scholarship and K-12 educators’ efforts at accurate and inclusive education, deeming it (and particularly K-12 efforts to discuss the full scope of racism in our nation) wholly inappropriate for school.” (Pollock, & Rogers, et al., 2022, p. vi)

Why Critical Race Theory (CRT) is Controversial

Here are a few key tenets important to understanding the root of the current controversy and its resulting racial anxiety:

1. A recognition that race is a socio-political construct and not connected to biology. There is one race, the human race.
2. Racism, the belief in the superiority of one race over others, exists. Racism is embedded within systems and institutions. It is codified in laws, and embedded in policies, practices, procedures and structures.
3. Systemic racism reinforces a racial hierarchy, creates our current racialized society, and bears primary responsibility for reproducing racial inequality.
4. Eradicating racism is solvable by changing laws and promoting education curricula that include complete and accurate historical narratives.

CRT: “Caricature”

To clarify about the [widespread misinformation](#) about CRT, here are some key facts:

- CRT is a theoretical lens used by scholars to understand phenomenon impacted by race; CRT is not taught in K-12 education (or undergraduate education), and may or may not have influenced any text or curriculum that addresses systemic racism.
- CRT centers race in the spectrum of theories that fall under the label “CRT,” and thus, since Marxism centers social class (and often takes a color-blind stance), CRT and Marxist theoretical lenses are in *tension*. In short, calling CRT “Marxist” is misleading at best, and simply false as worst. [See “Claim 2” [HERE](#).]
- *Very few students*, even graduate students, are assigned readings and lessons that examine what CRT is and how to use it in research. Most students will only ever experience CRT examined formally in graduate courses (law school, graduate education), and even then, CRT remains mostly in elective courses.

My journey with CRT

As a critical scholar who identifies with Marxist educational theory, I must emphasize that although I have completed every level of formal education through a doctorate, I have never once been assigned any CRT text or lesson. Further, my understanding and study of Marxism have primarily been on my own, beginning with [Marx's non-economic writings](#) (which I read by choice as an undergraduate after finding the book at a used book sale).

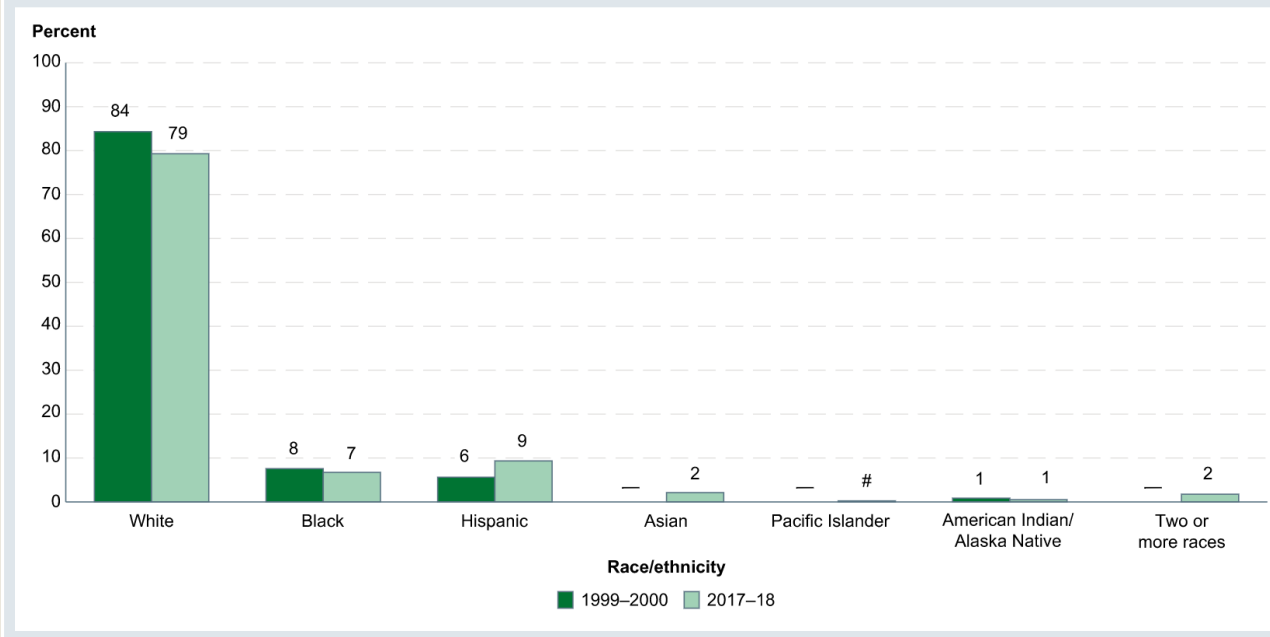
Is CRT Marxist Indoctrination?

CRT centers and forefronts race in examining social and cultural phenomena

Marxism centers and forefronts social class in examining social and cultural phenomena

Characteristics of Public School Teachers

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools, by race/ethnicity: School years 1999–2000 and 2017–18



Critical Race Theory: The Facts and Irony (for White People)

For legal scholars who have concluded that this racial rate inequity *cannot be explained by simply identifying individual police officers as racists*, CRT provides a process for understanding how and why the police officer shot and killed 12-year-old Rice.

Part of that explanation is systemic racism that influences everyone (regardless of their own race). For example, Black children are viewed as older than their biological ages:

The social category "children" defines a group of individuals who are perceived to be distinct, with essential characteristics including innocence and the need for protection (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000). The present research examined whether Black boys are given the protections of childhood equally to their peers. We tested 3 hypotheses: (a) that Black boys are seen as less "childlike" than their White peers, (b) that the characteristics associated with childhood will be applied less when thinking specifically about Black boys relative to White boys, and (c) that these trends would be exacerbated in contexts where Black males are dehumanized by associating them (implicitly) with apes (Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008). We expected, derivative of these 3 principal hypotheses, that individuals would perceive Black boys as being more responsible for their actions and as being more appropriate targets for police violence. We find support for these hypotheses across 4 studies using laboratory, field, and translational (mixed laboratory/field) methods. We find converging evidence that Black boys are seen as older and less innocent and that they prompt a less essential conception of childhood than do their White same-age peers. Further, our findings demonstrate that the Black/ape association predicted actual racial disparities in police violence toward children. These data represent the first attitude/behavior matching of its kind in a policing context. Taken together, this research suggests that dehumanization is a uniquely dangerous intergroup attitude, that intergroup perception of children is underexplored, and that both topics should be research priorities.

Critical Race Theory: The Facts and Irony (for White People)

The irony:

While anti-CRT advocates attack CRT as a form of racism and argue CRT labels all White people as racist, CRT actually poses that the killing of Rice is *not dependent on a racist police offer, but unexamined and unaddressed systemic biases against Black children*. To repeat: CRT does not suggest that the individual, who in this case killed the 12-year-old Rice, is racist.

Resources from NEPC

- [Understanding the Attacks on Critical Race Theory](#)
- [Critical Race Theory: What It Is. And What It Is Not. A Q&A With Adrienne Dixson](#)
- [NEPC Review: How to Regulate Critical Race Theory in Schools: A Primer and Model Legislation \(Manhattan Institute, August 2021\)](#)

BANNED IN THE USA: RISING SCHOOL BOOK BANS THREATEN FREE EXPRESSION AND STUDENTS' FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS

Concurrent with educational gag order legislation, book banning has increased dramatically, as [reported](#) by PEN America:

- *In total, for the nine-month period represented, the Index lists 1,586 instances of individual books being banned, affecting 1,145 unique book titles. This encompasses different types of bans, including removals of books from school libraries, prohibitions in classrooms, or both, as well as books banned from circulation during investigations resulting from challenges from parents, educators, administrators, board members, or responses to laws passed by legislatures. These numbers represent a count of cases either reported directly to PEN America and/or covered in the media; there may be other cases of bans that have not been reported and are thus not included in this count.*
- *The Index lists bans on 1,145 titles by 874 different authors, 198 illustrators, and 9 translators, impacting the literary, scholarly, and creative work of 1,081 people altogether.*
- *The Index lists book bans that have occurred in 86 school districts in 26 states. These districts represent 2,899 schools with a combined enrollment of over 2 million students.*

Book Bans: “Un-American”

In the fall of 1973, the Drake School Board in North Dakota banned Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

[Vonnegut](#), born November 11, what is now celebrated as Veterans Day, was a World War II veteran who survived the firebombing of Dresden. That horrific event a couple decades later became [Vonnegut’s most celebrated novel](#), the same novel banned after being assigned in Drake High School.

“I gather from what I read in the papers and hear on television that you imagine me, and some other writers, too, as being sort of ratlike people who enjoy making money from poisoning the minds of young people,” Vonnegut explained in a [letter](#) to the school board. There he also defended the value of his novels: “They beg that people be kinder and more responsible than they often are.”

Ultimately, Vonnegut pronounced the banning of his novel “un-American” and concluded, “you have insulted me, and I am a good citizen, and I am very real.”

Book Bans: “Un-American”

“The burning of books under the Nazi regime on May 10, 1933, is perhaps the most famous book burning in history,” detailed at the [Holocaust Encyclopedia](#). The justifications for the book burnings are hauntingly familiar when paired with comments from governors and school board members:

At the meeting places, students threw the pillaged and “unwanted” books onto bonfires with great ceremony, band-playing, and so-called “[fire oaths](#).” In Berlin, some 40,000 persons gathered in the Opernplatz to hear Joseph Goebbels deliver a fiery address: “No to decadence and moral corruption!” Goebbels enjoined the crowd. “Yes to decency and morality in family and state! I consign to the flames the writings of Heinrich Mann, [Ernst Gläser](#), Erich Kästner.” [HOLOCAUST ENCYCLOPEDIA](#)

Book Bans

- [Gov. McMaster wants investigation of 'obscene, pornographic materials' in SC schools](#)
- [Texas House committee to investigate school districts' books on race and sexuality \(see over 800 books listed to be banned\)](#)
- [Virginia school board member says removed books should be burned](#)
- [Freedom to Teach: Statement against Banning Books](#) (NCTE)

Book Bans

- [Statement on Censorship and Professional Guidelines](#) (NCTE)
- [Guidelines for Dealing with Censorship of Instructional Materials](#) (NCTE)
- [NCTE Intellectual Freedom Center](#)
- [The Students' Right to Read](#) (NCTE)

Students' right to read

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the largest organization of ELA teachers in the U.S., supports [The Students' Right to Read](#), including in part:

One of the foundations of a democratic society is the individual's right to read, and also the individual's right to freely choose what they would like to read. This right is based on an assumption that the educated possess judgment and understanding and can be trusted with the determination of their own actions. In effect, the reader is freed from the bonds of chance. The reader is not limited by birth, geographic location, or time, since reading allows meeting people, debating philosophies, and experiencing events far beyond the narrow confines of an individual's own existence.

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*

“This is a book of warning. It is a reminder that what we have is valuable, and that sometimes we take what we value for granted....

“People think—wrongly—that speculative fiction is about predicting the future, but it isn't; or if it is, it tends to do a rotten job of it....

“What speculative fiction is really good at is not the future but the present—taking an aspect of it that troubles or is dangerous, and extending and extrapolating that aspect into something that allows the people of that time to see what they are doing from a different angle and from a different place. It's cautionary.

“*Fahrenheit 451* is speculative fiction. It's an 'If this goes on...' story. Ray Bradbury was writing about his present, which is our past.”

INTRODUCTION, *FAHRENHEIT 451*, NEIL GAIMAN

From K-12 to Higher ed

- Higher ed - tenure (GA, FL)
- [Shaping the Narrative](#)

“No student or teacher should have to endorse critical race theory in order to attend, graduate from, or teach at our public universities,” Governor Kristi Noem [South Dakota], a Republican and the legislation’s chief architect, said in a statement upon signing it into law this week. “College should remain a place where freedom of thought and expression are encouraged, not stifled by political agendas.”

Legislation

- An avalanche of [gag order bills](#) were proposed in South Carolina—[H.4325](#), [H.4343](#), [H.4392](#), [H.4605](#), and [H.4799](#)
- [Compromise bill](#) out of Committee includes curriculum bans and parental trigger mechanisms (mandates that parents will be “be the primary source of their student’s education in regard to learning morals, ethics, and civic responsibility”).

Legislation

Compromise bill out of Committee:

1
2 Academic Transparency and Integrity
3
4 Section 59-29-600. (A) It is the intent of the General Assembly
5 that:
6 (1) all students learn in a positive learning environment where
7 they are made to feel welcomed, supported, and respected;
8 (2) high school students graduate having learned critical
9 thinking skills and being college ready and career ready;
10 (3) teachers, faculty, and staff strive to provide the best
11 educational opportunity possible to their students;
12 (4) the State Department of Education, State Board of
13 Education, and Education Oversight Committee regularly review,
14 revise, and publish statewide academic standards that are fair,
15 thorough, and respectful of teachers and students;

Legislation

■ Compromise bill out of Committee (cont.)

38

39 Section 59-29-620. (A) The following prohibited concepts may
40 not be included or promoted in a course of instruction, curriculum,
41 assignment, instructional program, instructional material, or
42 professional educator development or training:

1 (1) one race, sex, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin
2 is inherently superior to another race, sex, ethnicity, religion, color,
3 or national origin;

4 (2) an individual, by virtue of the race, sex, ethnicity, religion,
5 color, or national origin of the individual, inherently is privileged,
6 racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously;

Legislation

- [Compromise bill](#) out of Committee (cont.)

17 (6) meritocracy or traits such as a hard work ethic:
18 (a) are racist or sexist; or
19 (b) were created by members of a particular race or sex to
20 oppress members of another race, sex, ethnicity, color, or national
21 origin; and
22 (7) fault, blame, or bias should be assigned to race, sex,
23 ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin, or to members of a race,
24 sex, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin because of their
25 race, sex, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin.

Legislation

- National - [copy-cat legislation](#)
- “if you're trying to make sense of Florida's new *don't say gay* law, including why its **vagueness is a feature not a bug**” [Jennifer Berkshire](#)

Academic freedom isn't free

- [Educators' Right and Responsibilities to Engage in Antiracist Teaching \(NCTE\)](#)
- Analysis | ['Educators are afraid,' says teacher attacked for 'Romeo and Juliet' unit](#)
- Beware self-censorship

**A threat to academic
freedom anywhere is a
threat to academic freedom
everywhere**