**American Irony: Silencing CRT in the Name of Democracy**

Last summer, I sat in my cousin’s backyard in Texas, watching fiery bursts of red, white, and blue shoot up into the sky, shimmering before disappearing into the vast expanse. Across the nation, children like me were celebrating the day that America became “the land of the free” with streamers and watermelon slices. However, on July 4th, 1776, this land wasn’t so free for every American: nearly ninety years passed before enslavement was outlawed. While June 19th, 1865, represents the conclusion of American slavery, racism has continued to exist on this land for centuries. On July 4th, 2022, the ⅗ compromise, redlining, police brutality, and many other systemic problems will still harm thousands of minorities. For example, in 2020, African Americans living in Chicago made up almost three-quarters of COVID-related deaths, yet it’s impossible for a virus particle itself to be bigoted[[1]](#footnote-1). It’s time to realize that the problem stems from the system.

That realization only exists in a world where Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is taught in classrooms. With Fox News mentioning CRT almost 1300 times since last March, often portraying it in a negative light, the anti-CRT movement risks losing the realization that, while individuals are part of the problem, racism still exists in a world without bigots.[[2]](#footnote-2) What we risk is young children beginning to think that their individual beliefs of acceptance are enough. We lose the need for people to use their privilege to change the system itself, to push legal reform; we ourselves are the problem if we don’t recognize where the problem initially came from. We are the future of policy. It’s our responsibility to not only challenge individuals’ bigoted beliefs but to change the system that has robbed so many of their dreams. The current education system doesn’t teach our children this responsibility. The national history I was taught in elementary school was Charlie Brown’s Thanksgiving, that the pilgrims were friends with the natives, sharing gravy and mashed potatoes. Even through junior high and upper school, none of my teachers have explained *why* African Americans have the highest incarceration rate or *why* there is a wage gap on the basis of race.[[3]](#footnote-3) To this day, one educator has been the one to tell me “blame the system.” And I’ll get my driver’s license this summer.

Part of the issue with this education is that specific aspects of our history are significantly under covered. Angela Merkel didn’t commit genocide against 6 million Jewish people, yet she takes the responsibility to implement Holocaust education programs in every German school. In contrast, by my freshmen year, I had read one book about slavery, zero about the slaughter of Indigenous people, and none about Japanese internment camps. Yet, I did read four books about the Holocaust. Our education system won’t allow teachers to hold our country accountable for its own mistakes but is quick to point out the faults of other nations. History should be told as it happened; anything that occurred should be taught. We need to learn from our own past so we can write our future to be different. We have the power to change our story, and we can’t let history repeat itself.

We risk the possibility of this repetition by not teaching CRT and not accounting for our flaws. Current politicians don’t recognize the inequitable system we live in, and by banning CRT, future generations won’t recognize this either. As change ceases, the future of thousands of minorities will represent the system we live in: broken and unfair. Some love to preach democracy and freedom of expression to the point where no one can admit that our current system isn’t so equitable and free itself. By silencing CRT, the very same people who advocate for free speech silence the voices of educators across the nation. Ironically, as sociologist Victor Ray states, “making laws outlawing critical race theory confirms the point that racism is embedded in the law”[[4]](#footnote-4)

To achieve a truly just future, it’s time to stop covering up our past and pretending that our present is perfect. Critics of CRT often argue that it teaches our youth that America was founded on racism, or that it divides groups into the oppressor and the oppressed. In some ways, they’re right. America was founded on racism: African Americans were counted as only ⅗ of a person in the original US constitution. Current society is divided: hate groups like the KKK still have rallies in our state today, placing some on a pedestal while demoting others. In today’s world, it’s simply a fact that certain people hold privilege while others face oppression: not teaching CRT doesn’t change that. We first need to accept our situation before we can change it: by allowing anti-CRT legislation to pass, removing the mandate to teach the KKK as morally wrong, we enable racist behavior, and we enable hate.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, an inspiration to many, including myself, once said “It’s very hard for me to see how you can have a racial objective but a nonracial means to get there.”[[5]](#footnote-5) The current system is racist, as centuries of exclusionary policies and discrimination affect minorities today. If we’re serious about mitigating racism, the approach must take race into account. To put an end to discrimination, state governments, or even those on the federal level, need to not only stop anti-CRT legislation but further encourage the teaching of CRT in schools. If we truly want change, we need to replace our fear of upset parents and conspiracies with a desire to do what’s right, addressing the flaws in our current system and acknowledging our mistakes. If we don’t act now, we lose the potential of future generations changing policy for a more equitable future. We lose the chance of repairing a system that broke so many. The time for this repair, the time for this change is now. This is our fight, and we can’t wait.

1. Hopkins Medicine, 2020 <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/covid19-racial-disparities> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Business Insider, 2021 <https://www.businessinsider.com/fox-news-critical-race-theory-mentions-thousand-study-2021-6> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Center for American Progress, 2012, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-top-10-most-startling-facts-about-people-of-color-and-criminal-justice-in-the-united-states/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Brookings, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2021/07/02/why-are-states-banning-critical-race-theory/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Vanguard, 2021, <https://www.davisvanguard.org/2021/06/monday-morning-thoughts-do-conservatives-even-understand-what-critical-race-theory-is/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)