

The Race Obsession~Avoidance Paradox: The historical rhyming of racial rhetoric

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Alessi, Levan, Kebles Forum

Virtual Diversity Summit

Becky Willow Ed.D, LPC, NCC

Gannon University

Clinical Mental Health Counseling Program

willow004@gannon.edu



Presentation agenda

- Historical racial rhetoric
- Contemporary rhymes & villains
- Parallel fears
- The Race Obsession~Avoidance Paradox
- Implications
- Discussion, feedback, questions

"Wars are won by teachers."

Historical racial rhetoric

1~1829	Walker's Appeal
2~1865~1877	Reconstruction
3~1950~70	Civil Rights movement
4~2020+	CRT

1~1829~Walker's Appeal

- A pamphlet arguing against slavery; attempted to inspire or “awaken” slaves to their situation and potential

Legal/political response

- Seditious publications act, Anti-literacy law
- “any document that would tend to excite dissatisfaction in their minds and to produce insurrection and rebellion”
- “an uneducated black population made white citizens feel more secure against both abolitionists and slave uprising”

2~ 1865~1877 Reconstruction:

- Post Civil War; Black integration into political system & civic life

Legal/political responses

- White southerners stripped voting rights, retook control over government positions; Poll taxes, seizing of property, the heyday of the KKK, lynching and other terrorism

3~ 1950~70 Civil Rights movement

Legal/Political responses

- The Southern Strategy
- Coded racial appeals to “law & order”; end to protests, marches and boycotts, “war on drugs”~racial coding
- Benign neglect of civil rights enforcement
- Lasted through the 1990s~still racially coded to target POC
- Lead to Reagan’s depiction of underserving takers he called “welfare queens”

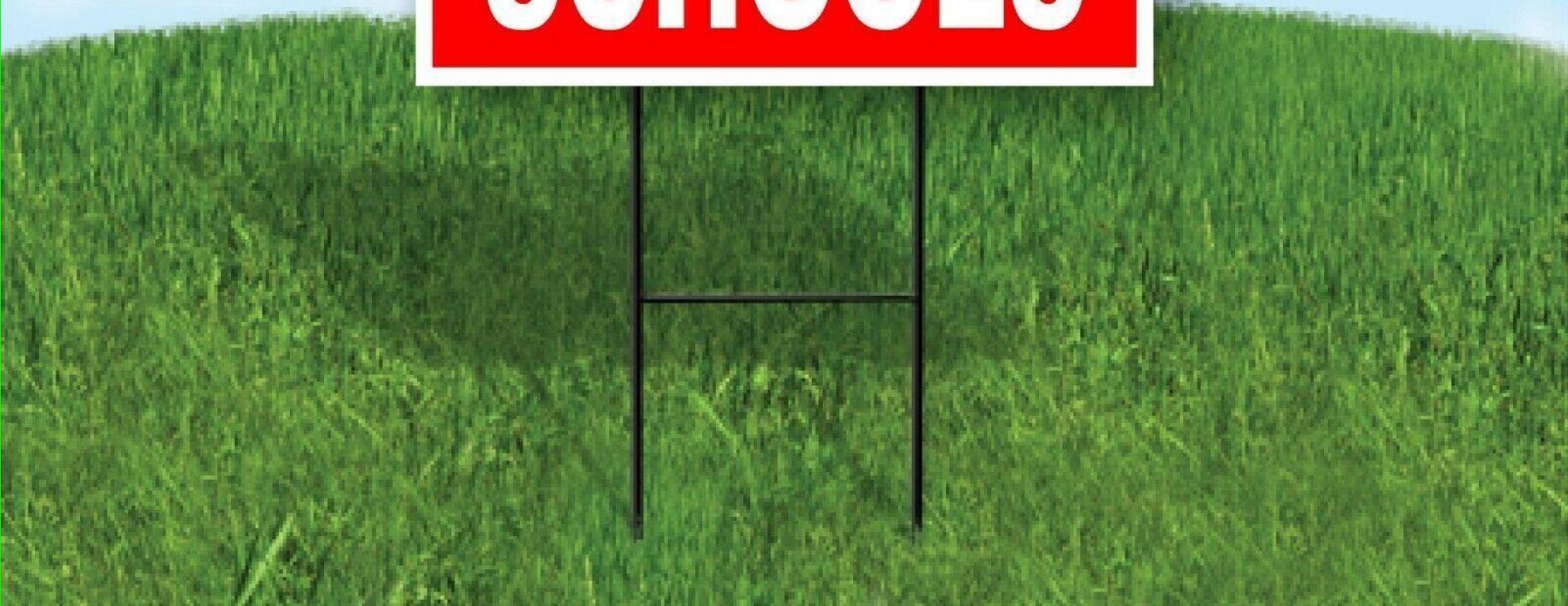
4~2020+ Critical Race Theory



- 1980s Doctoral & Legal scholarship
- “Study of law & how it has been part of the infrastructure upon which racial inequalities have been based”
- How law has been a conduit for racial disparity
(Crenshaw, 2022)

Legal/Political responses:

**NO CRT
IN OUR
SCHOOLS**

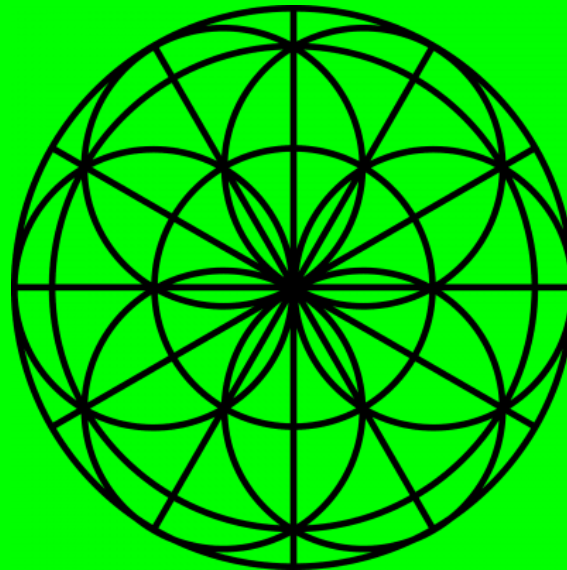


- “CRT is the perfect villain”

- Christopher Rufo

- “Leading the fight against the left-wing ideological regime”.

- Christopher Rufo (signature on website)






“Since January 2021, 42 states have introduced bills or taken other steps that would restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism, according to an Education Week analysis. Seventeen states have imposed these bans and restrictions either through legislation or other avenues”.

The sweep

- <https://abcnews.go.com/US/alabama-governor-signs-bill-prohibiting-dei-programs-schools/story?id=108334252>
- <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06>

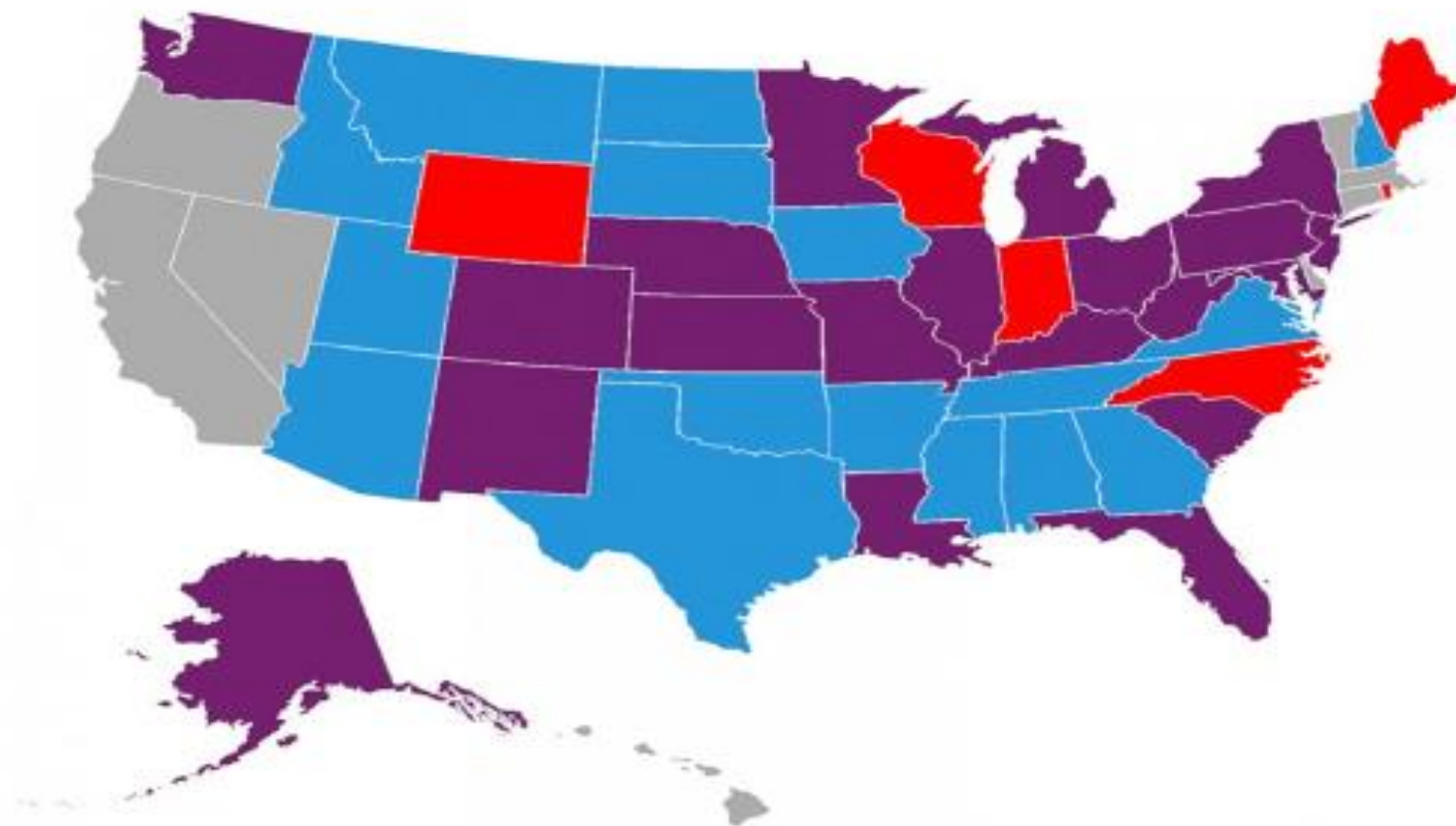
Anti-critical Race Theory Education Efforts Across the U.S.

LEGISLATION THAT WOULD RESTRICT EDUCATION ON RACE IN CLASSROOMS OR STATE AGENCIES HAS BEEN INTRODUCED AND SIGNED INTO LAW ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

 Signed into law / budget

 Failed to pass

 Proposed / pending



AS OF 3/23/22

SOURCE: U.S. STATE LEGISLATURES, THE AFRICAN AMERICAN POLICY FORUM AND EDUCATION WEEK

 NEWS

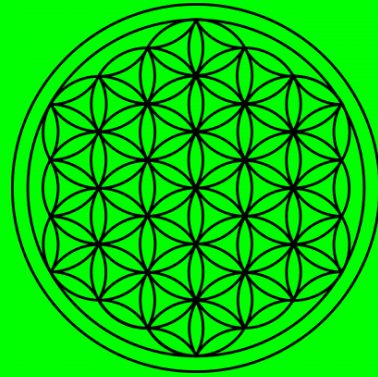
What has it become?

“The accusation that the nation’s schools have been taken over by an ideology bent on racial division and the political indoctrination of children. [Namely], Critical Race Theory. That accusation has prompted something on the order of half the states to in some way move to restrict the instruction schools provide students.” (Chenoweth & Marshall, 2021)

- A straw-man standing in for anything that has to do with race
- Representative of culture war waged in schools
- Diversity, equity, justice language/training conflated as CRT
- <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/anti-critical-race-theory-laws-are-slowing-down-here-are-3-things-to-know/2024/03>



The sub-text

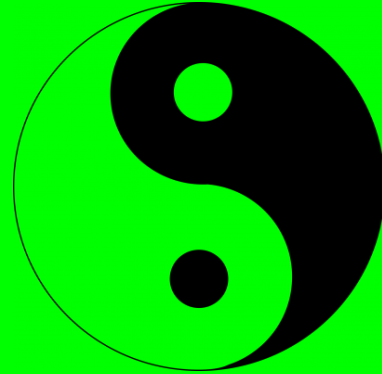


- Context of police shootings; George Floyd
- 1500X mentioned by Fox News
(MediaMatters as cited by Chenoweth & Marshall, 2021)
- Elections, culture war, strategic
- Laws written to address “discomfort” level of students
- Attempts to eliminate cognitive dissonance
- Also conflates gender/sexual orientation into discourse

Tracking the attacks on CRT

- A UCLA Law study found that in 2021 and 2022, government officials introduced 563 measures aimed at restricting teaching about race and racism; 241 of those measures have been adopted.
- Nearly half of the proposed measures borrowed language from the now-rescinded Executive Order 13950, which was issued by former President Donald Trump in 2020.
- More than 90% of the measures targeted instruction at K–12 schools.
- https://crtforward.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/UCLA-Law_CRT-Report_Final.pdf

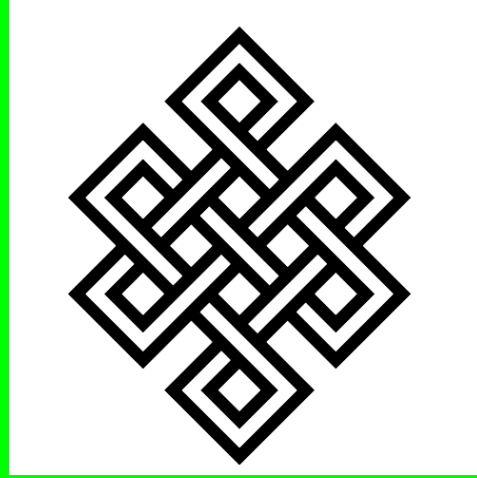
“The Critical Race Theory Craze That’s Sweeping the Nation”



- Southlake, TX
- Exemplifies national divide over how race/gender is addressed in schools
- District Diversity Council created Cultural Competence Action Plan to address concerns
- Southlake Families PAC organized protest/voted no
- “An NBC News analysis found that in the four months after Southlake’s May 1st election, at least 220 school districts across the country faced backlash against diversity and equity initiatives.”

(Hixenbaugh & Hylton, 2022)

Broader tensions & implications



- Questioning curriculum choice
- Removal & banning of library books
- Removal of social justice flags
- Banning of words (diversity)
- Teachers/administrators fired for teaching about racism
- Legal complexities

“The dissemination of curricular content and instruction based on CRT
.....distracts educators and students away from rigorous learning content,
while also teaching ideas that undermine the value of individual liberty and
America’s founding ideals and further embedding the concept of systemic
racism in the public conscious”

(Butcher & Gonzalaz, 2020)

“As a government and politics teacher who’s teaching an AP aligned course, my
course articulation says that I need to talk about Reconstruction. I need to talk
about Jim Crow voter suppression, I need to talk about Supreme Court
precedents like Brown vs. Board, Plessy vs. Ferguson, Loving vs. Virginia. I talk
about the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and the fact that they say that
Black Americans became full citizens based on 1964. I talk about current voter
ID laws, I talk about phony voting laws. I talk about racial Gerrymandering.
According to the moral panickers on the political Right, that’s Critical Race
Theory. But that’s just civics. That’s just history. And so, what you’re really
seeing is an effort to ban effective and complete telling of history”

(Nate Bowling, social studies teacher, 2016 Washington teacher of the year as
cited by Chenoweth & Marshall, 2021)

Parallels & Rhymes

- We often memorize and mark singular historical events vs. understand the parallels and connections
- “Slavery is taught as a dot on a timeline”
- Purpose of CRT is to explore the systemic factors
 - More effective = More threatening
- Connect the dots

Parallel Rhetoric & Patterns of Fear

- Fear of “Black uprising”; Education leads to insurrection and rebellion
- “Literacy is a gateway to liberation”
- Personal liberties
- Right to vote; Curtailment of Free and fair elections
- Curriculum & Textbook protests
- Indoctrination into woke
- Whose narrative will be taught
- “Why do we continue to frame the truth as controversial?”
- “We don’t want our kids to learn the ugly stuff.”
- “Wars are won by teachers.” Vladimir Putin
- “The path to save the nation is very simple—it’s going to go through the school boards.” Steve Bannon







THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION ON RACE

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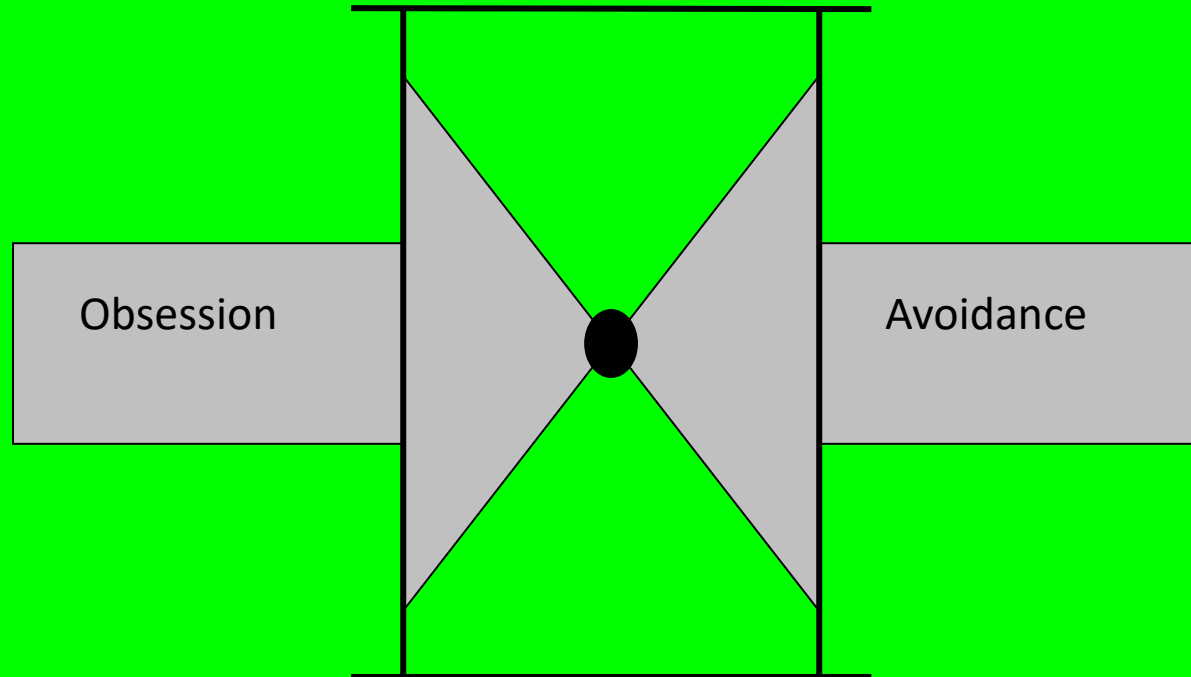



Race Obsession~Avoidance Paradox

- Defines nation
- Promotes national paralysis
- “We are loathe to confront one another around race” Dalton
- “As our need to communicate across racial lines increases due to the changing demography of our country, we seem less able to do so.” Tatum



The Race Obsession~Avoidance Paradox (ROAParadox) Model



In this visual conceptualization of the race obsession-avoidance paradox (ROAParadox), meaningful symbols are incorporated. The  ideogram means “avoid” and II is the alchemist sign for “fixation”. That they both exist simultaneously in the same figure expresses the paradox. The center dot represents the individual or group that becomes immobilized by the pressures, symbolized by the arrows, of obsession and avoidance.

The Chilling Effect

- Perspective taking is compromised
- Is it possible to educate students without some discomfort?
- Teachers further intimidated to teach history
- School boards/parents intimidated
- Threats



Educational & Mental Health Implications

- Effects on children & future generations
- Compromised critical thinking skills
- Cultural pain of marginalized groups
- Under-estimate our humanity



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