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Special Issue

Teaching Critical Race Theory: Experiences from the
Frontlines

Guest Editors:

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Editors

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From the Editors

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From the Editors

In this special issue, Daniella Ann Cook and Simone A. F. Gause, guest editors, with their colleagues, reckon with and discuss their experience in the Critical Race Theory Summer Institute (CRTSI). Organized to support “undergraduate and graduate students, new and seasoned faculty, community members and classroom teachers, committed to anti-racist practice and praxis,” the CRTSI occurred in Columbia, South Carolina in 2019 and 2021. This special issue describes the process of creating this community and the subsequent backlash against the institute.

To write a history--to share how, under what conditions, what happened, when, in response to what—is to claim this place in this particular moment in history. It is a belief in the worth and value of history itself and is also a radical faith in others who will read and carry forth that history. We believe that the kind of reckoning that Cook and Gause provide is critical, but is especially important now, as states and higher education institutions are continuing their assaults on critical race theory and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

As editors, we found ourselves reflecting on the trauma embedded within the context of the time and space of the CRTSI. We had visceral reactions—taking deep breaths— as to read this special issue is to re-member, re-experience, and re-remind ourselves of the deep dis-locations and mis-locations in time and relationship precipitated by the pandemic and the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor among too many others. The global pandemic, with forced distancing between people in nearly all fabrics of life, coupled with the “racial reckoning” of 2020, precipitated a heightened awareness of the importance of relating and relationships. It also reminded us that our distance, particularly in our understanding of institutional racism and the realities of Black life,

was far greater than we wanted to admit as a society. It was clear that change needed to happen, and the change needed to include more active participation of coalitions of people across racial lines.

The themes for this issue center on the importance of relationships, the need to tell our stories, and the weaponization of theories intended to transform inequitable practices.

The following themes emerged for us in this issue:

- Relationships are central to how we make meaning of our lived experiences. Relationships not only frame how we make sense of historical trauma, they are foundational to how we are able to survive and move through those traumatic events. They are also central to moving forward and managing change—change in mindset, understanding, and action—particularly when working in the field of education.
- Whenever historically marginalized people gather for work that centers self-actualization, they will be under surveillance and policed. Because power is the ultimate weapon, any theory created by those on the margins can be used against them (us).
- We must be vigilant in work that names our experiences in theory and in practice.
- Art is essential. Art evokes emotion. Art carries the contraindications and complexities of our thoughts and emotions, offers rearrangements, captures the subconscious. Because of these qualities, art can spark new ways of thinking and new

ideas/ways for becoming and being whole.
Art can catalyze change.

From the moment we are born, we are not only immersed in history, we also inhale it. Given this, we must speak our history, write it, make it into art, and share it with people who let us know that we are not alone in our experiences nor in our need to make meaning of it. Spaces like the CRTSI are essential.

With this special issue on the Critical Race Theory Summer Institute, Cook and Gause with the authors give us documents to reckon with. Once we read, we know. Once we know, we

cannot forget, should not forget. This special issue inspires and leads us to consider, in the words of poet-activist Susan Briante, *How do we use the documents we have to imagine [and work for] something else?*

Gretchen Givens Generett
Paula Groves Price
Mary Kay Delaney

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Teaching CRT - Experiences from the Frontlines: Introduction from the Guest Editors

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For black folks teaching – educating – was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle... We learned early that our devotion to learning, to a life of the mid, was a counter-hegemonic act, a fundamental way to resist every strategy of white racist colonization.

bell hooks (1994) p.2

*Life confronts us with countless challenges and irritations, so that the challenge often lies in determining **which ones are worth** (emphasis ours) confronting and speaking out quickly enough to do some good.*

Delgado & Stefancic (2022) p.23

Learning spaces as communal fundamentally resists every strategy of white racist colonization by foregrounding ways of knowing within communities of Color. hooks' (1994) reflection on the teaching approaches of her mostly Black women teachers' enactment of "a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anticolonial" (p.2) advances the idea of classrooms being communal learning spaces as counter-hegemonic. In many ways, hooks is echoed in critical race pedagogy's (Lynn, 1999; Lynn and Jennings, 2000; Lynn, Jennings, and Hughes, 2013) fusion of African Womanist and Black Feminist pedagogies to center Black-teacher practices within and beyond formal schooling to foreground ways to resist intersectional oppression.

Often discussions of teaching, especially in higher education, center on the formal learning space of the classroom rather than informal

learning spaces in and beyond the university classroom. Since education writ large occurs in many non-academic informal spaces, a group of education scholars endeavored to create such an informal learning community. In 2019 and 2021, a multiracial group of faculty within and beyond the University of South Carolina's College of Education created the Critical Race Theory Summer Institute (CRTSI) as an inter-and trans-disciplinary approach to engage pedagogically and methodologically with CRT. Intentionally disrupting the boundaries between community and classroom, the CRTSI embodied a different way of engaging with people (undergraduate and graduate students, new and seasoned faculty, community members and classroom teachers) committed to anti-racist practice and praxis. Participants, including presenters and attendees, understood CRT as a means to operationalize intersectional racial justice commitments in our work.

So, as part of the larger critical race theory community, CRTSI organizers are interested in and write about how to offensively undertake critical race work. In doing so, we embed the CRTSI eight commitments developed by the 2019 conveners to guide our work. These commitments are:

1. Community matters.
2. Dialogue is central: talking with and deep listening.
3. Co-facilitation is our norm.
4. Learning CRT is a journey.
5. Practicing CRT is a journey.

6. CRT is an iterative process (that requires repetition of learning to generate racially just outcomes).
7. Speak your truth. You are where you are. Own it.
8. Discomfort is productive and generative.

Each commitment guided the development and delivery of the CRTSI experience. Our co-created commitments articulate our “concerted effort to present [this experience] as a counter-hegemonic text” (Baszile, 2008, p.252) where our relationships mirror belief in critical engagement within community. This orientation is captured in the work of Derrick Bell (2008) and the spaces created by germinal legal critical race scholars (e.g., LatCrit convenings). At the heart of this work was nurturing critical race scholars (both within and beyond the academy) in a brave space (Leonardo & Porter, 2010) of communal learning. In this sense, stories are our sources of context and can serve as hope, inspiration, and a chronicle of our lives (Lawrence, 1995). The collective papers in this special issue story our engagement in critical race pedagogy in informal learning spaces as experienced and recalled from various vantage points. We draw on our pedagogical experiences to explore critical moments (Delgado & Stefancic, 2021) in teaching critical race theory (CRT).

Delgado & Stefancic (2022) aptly observe, “Understanding one’s times—or even one’s own life—is no simple task” (p.23). As such, the origins and utility of CRT lies in commitments to not only understand challenges of the times but knowing how to address to do some good. Critical moments are best understood retrospectively because they require knowledge of relatively unknown events, demonstrate connections between seemingly disparate events, and be teachable moments of opportunities to show courage. Though CRT offers many tools for discerning critical moments, conceptual and interpretive, there are challenges to seeing and

understanding the significance of a moment including, but not limited to, recognizing relationships between events and “interpreting events while living through them” (p.30). For those committed to challenging racial oppression and white supremacy, we must refine our pedagogies to better strategize/engage in a liberatory praxis to expand our teaching. In many ways, this special issue aligns with Hughes’ (2017) conceptualization of “education writ large” which exceeds school and campus boundaries to include encounters between individuals and communities with the potential to change one another for the...better” (p.4). As a critical race committed community of scholars, the papers highlight strategic moves and lessons learned from engaging publicly in critical race theory at the inception of the public political attacks against CRT.

These are invited manuscripts from the co-directors/co-facilitators of the CRTSI. Through their unique perspectives, the author(s) share experiential insights about engaging critical race theory in a particular moment of retrenchment. As Crenshaw (1988) sagely describes,

*[We] can afford neither to resign [ourselves] to, nor to attach frontally, the legitimacy and incoherence of the dominant ideology... [So,] the task at hand is to devise ways to wage ideological and political struggle while minimizing the costs of engaging in an inherently legitimating discourse. **A clearer understanding of the space we occupy** [emphasis ours] in the American political [and educational] consciousness is a necessary prerequisite to the development of pragmatic strategies for political and economic survival.*

Collectively, the papers in this special issue grapple with the how to advance the CRT commitment to antiracist multiracial democracy in their respective spaces. Each paper in the issue reflects on and addresses the following question, emphasizing CRT’s relationship to critiques of structures and institutions: What was your

critical moment in engaging with CRT and what were the key lessons learned?

*“A Much-needed Opportunity to Talk about Race”:
History of the Critical Race Theory Summer Institute -*
Allison Anders and Michelle Bryan detail for us the origin story of the CRTSI. The Critical Race Theory Summer Institute (CRTSI), held in Columbia, South Carolina, serves as a potent, albeit contested, site for fostering critical discourse on race in contemporary U.S. society. This article delves into the history of the institute, exploring its origins, mission, and objectives. While acknowledging the ongoing controversies surrounding CRT, the authors argue that the institute presents a valuable opportunity to engage in open and honest conversations about race, its historical and contemporary effects, and potential pathways towards a more equitable future. Despite aforementioned complexities, the authors relay how the institute fosters crucial engagement with complex issues of race through open dialogue and critical analysis, emphasizing its potential as a much-needed platform for productive discourse.

Why We Can't Wait: The Summers of Our Renewed Discontent - Simone A. F. Gause and C. Spencer Platt discuss the significance of the intergenerational call to action within the flashpoints of the summers of 2020 and 2021 on the 60th anniversary of MLK Jr.'s, “Why We Can't Wait.” As the authors recount their summers of renewed discontent, they underscore the necessity and utility of CRT in higher education. In the article, Gause and Platt provide several examples for us to understand the intersections of power, privilege, and oppression, fostering a critical consciousness necessary to dismantle these systems. Using a historical and contemporary context to bridge the traditional boundaries of academia, the authors encourage faculty and students to engage in community-based partnerships, experiential learning, and social justice advocacy. This approach empowers those within higher education to become agents

of change, working alongside grassroots organizers to address the root causes of racial disparities and build a more just and equitable future for all.

Resisting Fear: An Introspective Dialogue on Coalition Building in South Carolina - David G. Martínez draws on personal narrative to problematize the policy moves made by state legislators. Specifically, he targets the ways legislation not only counters historical accuracy in learning but undermines the experiential knowing and knowledges of minoritized communities. After providing an overview of the current politics of education and anti-CRT legislation in South Carolina, Martínez explores the possibilities for coalitions to engage in collective action for Freire's *conscientização* to catalyze solidarity in efforts to confront social, political, and economic inequities.

Creating Critical Collective Art: Insights and Evocations Against 'Hate Ideology, Ginned-Up Propaganda, and Attacks on CRT' - Allison Anders takes us on an artistic journey of the potential for arts-based workshops to foster critical reflection and engagement with social justice issues, particularly through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT). The collective storytelling draws on insights and participant experiences from a workshop centered on the work of legal scholar and activist Mari Matsuda. Matsuda's critiques of power structures and systemic racism can be particularly impactful when explored through creative expression. Anders discusses how the workshop fostered critical dialogue and reflection on race, power, and social justice through the act of creating art collectively. Furthermore, the article highlights the potential of arts-based approaches to evoke emotions, challenge assumptions, and inspire social change.

The CRT Conundrum in South Carolina and Across the United States of America - Simone A. F. Gause, Michelle Bryan, and Daniella Ann Cook close out the special issue by exploring the

continued controversy surrounding Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the educational landscape. The authors specifically examine the impact of South Carolina's final budget appropriations bill HB4100 (2022) and its associated proviso HB630 (2022). Proviso HB630, aimed at restricting teachings deemed to promote certain interpretations of CRT, led to confusion, self-censorship among educators, and a chilling effect on discussions of race and social issues. The ensuing legal conundrum highlights the potential infringement on free speech and the negative consequences for students, particularly those

from marginalized communities. While legal challenges are underway, the epilogue emphasizes the broader national significance of this debate and its implications for open dialogue, critical thinking, and a well-rounded education.

We honor your commitment in reading this Special Issue and engaging with this challenging and critically important subject. For everyone, we wish increasing hope, compassion and clarity as we seek to contribute as co-learners individually and collectively to creating a more equitable, just and sustainable learning spaces and communities.

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“A Much-needed Opportunity to Talk about Race”: History of the Critical Race Theory Summer Institute Discussion

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*However self-sufficient we may fancy ourselves, we exist only in relation -- to our friends, family, and life partners; to those we teach and mentor; to our co-workers, neighbors, strangers; and even to forces we cannot fully conceive of, let alone define. we exist only in relation **and** [i]n many ways, we are our relationships. [emphasis ours]*

Derrick Bell, 2008

The University of South Carolina’s first Critical Race Theory Summer Institute (CRTSI), held in the summer of 2019, was a response to our doctoral students’ interest in deeper engagement with critical race theory given the constant evolution of the field. While an introductory course on Critical Race Theory in education had been taught in the College since 2008, students began asking for an advanced course in 2016. In 2018, faculty in the College of Education across multiple departments and fields of education (cultural and social foundations of education, teacher education, and educational leadership) came together to discuss ways to respond to the students’ interests and needs. Consequently, while we worked to develop a new advanced course, we decided to begin addressing immediate needs through the creation of a CRT summer institute – CRTSI.

As a historical piece, the authors use 'we' to indicate the collective history of the CRTSI rather than a reflection of the co-authors' standpoints. We provide some of the history of CRTSI in 2019 and the subsequent gathering in

2021 to demystify the process of organizing such an event (see for example, Crenshaw, 2002) and to engage directly the historical and political contexts of the moments in which we worked and still work. Organizing, praxis, and critical social theorizing are always entangled with particular contexts in particular moments. The histories of Critical Legal Studies and what became Critical Race Theory are no exceptions (Anders & DeVita, 2024; Crenshaw, 2002; Matsuda, 1991). The CRTSI of 2019 and 2021 occurred amongst concrete relations, ideas and plans set in motion by individuals--and responded to--by individuals. We offer descriptions of “a series of interactions, events, personal relationships and institutional engagements” (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 1344) of the institutes as one part of the dialectical engagement with them that our colleagues share across the articles in this special issue.

Community Centered: Approach to Leadership and Design of Institute

We intentionally designed the institute to differ from an academic conference where presentations given by scholars to a passive audience dominate. Deeply informed by group centered leadership and the organizing tradition of the Civil Rights Movement, we crafted a workshop approach (Baker, 1960, 1974; Carson, 1995; Horton, 1998). We did not want to ‘present’, nor create ‘lectures’ on CRT; rather, we wanted the design of the institute to reflect our commitment to spaces where everyone participated in learning together. Consequently, we advertised the institute as an opportunity to deepen one’s understanding of “race in teaching and researching racial inequity, analyzing racial

hierarchies, and resisting their reproduction” in a format the featured “deep dialogue in small groups around key issues identified by participants.”

We also felt strongly the institute should be grounded in our shared beliefs about what CRT required of us as a community of practice. As shared in Cook and Gause’s (2024) introduction to this special issue, the institute was guided by the following eight commitments:¹

1. **Community matters.**
2. **Dialogue is central.** Talking with and deep listening is our practice.
3. **Co-facilitation is our norm.**
4. **Learning CRT is a journey.**
5. **Practicing CRT is a journey.**
6. **CRT is an iterative process.** The practice of CRT requires repetition of learning to generate racially just outcomes.
7. **Speak your truth.** You are where you are. Own it.
8. **Discomfort is productive and generative.**

In the end, the inaugural CRTSI was an intimate, three-day affair with 15 participants, six co-facilitators, and two guest speakers - Dr. David Stovall and Dr. Laurence Parker - who served as our “CRTSI Visionary Leaders” and offered the Institute’s keynotes. Graduate students in education, journalism, and social work joined us, and faculty and staff in education, and faculty in social work participated as well. We designed both introductory and more advanced sessions – offering broad overviews of the field and key commitments and we workshopped theoretical concepts and critical race methodologies. Our commitment to co-facilitation meant we also shared ongoing debates and invited participants to explore those tensions with us. We addressed the needs students had identified through our preconference survey and co-

facilitated sessions where we examined specific theoretical concepts, for example, interest convergence (Bell, 1980; 2004), whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) and counter storytelling (Bell, 1992; Delgado, 1989; Lawrence, 1992; Torres & Milun, 1990) .

Throughout the Institute that first summer, we balanced deep engagement with opportunities to build community. Indeed, while each session incorporated time for participants to learn about and engage with one another, larger community building also took place; for example, at the reception we held for participants at a local restaurant adjacent to campus as well as through the Harambee which opened the Institute’s first full day. We intentionally built in time each day for collective processing accompanied by individual reflection and planning. Moreover, understanding the importance of balancing the kind of intensity that engaging in CRT often requires with an equally intense focus on self-care, we included a session on radical play and methods of self-care.

Notably, in their evaluations of the engagement, attendees expressed appreciation for the participant-centered workshopping and community building in which we engaged and shared their enthusiasm for the Institute’s return the following summer. One doctoral student participant from a School of Journalism and Mass Communications shared:

I really appreciated the welcoming setting for young scholars such as myself to feel comfortable to learn, ask questions, and share my personal insight on CRT. The most helpful part(s) of the institute were the exchange of ideas from other scholars The faculty offered tangible plans to improve your research interests while encouraging us to sharpen actionable ways to achieve them. Great networking across different disciplines, it was a much-needed opportunity to

¹ Originally, co-created as agreements amongst the co-directors/co-facilitators of the institute to aid us

in planning, preparation, and design, we adopted them as commitments in CRTSI work.

*talk about race, diversity, and even lack thereof
in a safe space of wonderful scholars!*

As co-directors/co-facilitators, our excitement about the feedback as well as possibilities for expansion motivated us to begin planning the 2020 Institute as soon as the first one ended.

Interrupted: Summer 2020 to Summer 2021

In planning for the summer 2020 CRTSI, we decided to maintain the workshop-based model and again opened the engagement to students, educators, faculty, community members and organizers. By creating both introductory and advanced workshops focused on history, praxis, community engagement, inquiry, and research, we had hoped to cater to the needs of those both new to the ideas of CRT as well as those already engaged with it. While we actively planned throughout the winter of 2020 as March approached and the traumatic losses associated with the COVID 19 pandemic deepened - accompanied by a vacuum of leadership at the national level that deepened the crisis – we were forced to cancel the Institute. Without the technological infrastructure (that would come in later months) or the funding to alter its format, we were simply unable to pivot.

Then the spark of the 2020 racial reckoning began.

On February 23rd, three white men murdered Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed African American man who was jogging near his home in Georgia. His assailants would not be indicted for another four months. Then, police killed an unarmed African American woman named Breonna Taylor in their reckless raid of her apartment in Kentucky on March 13th. While the Arbery case bounced from prosecutor to prosecutor, George Floyd, an unarmed African American man, was suffocated to death on May 25th by Derek Chauvin, a police officer in Minnesota. The protests that began in Georgia

for Ahmaud Arbery, which spilled over into Kentucky for Breonna Taylor, ignited across the country and around the world in response to the modern day lynching of George Floyd which had been captured on video.

While the pandemic raged on, virtual connections gave way to offline face-to-face protests and vigils, marking a new wave of racial reckoning in mainstream spaces. Athletes, community leaders, Black Lives Matter™, and family members of Arbery, Taylor, and Floyd ensured that the assault on Black lives caught the attention of both Wall Street and Washington, D.C. Working with organizations like the African American Policy Forum, co-founded in 1996 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the Women's National Basketball Association promoted AAPF's *Say Her Name* campaign and dedicated its 2020 season to Breonna Taylor. Seeking "justice for the women and girls who have been the forgotten victims of police brutality and racial violence," players wore uniforms that displayed Breonna Taylor's name (WNBA/ WNBPA, 2020).

Consequently, the summer of 2020 found many of the institute's co-directors/co-facilitators creating and leading new diversity initiatives, book discussions, and working groups. We spoke in multiple virtual forums--academic, faith-based, community-driven--about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and brokered new connections across social networks. The consistent and widespread international outrage over the deaths of Arbery, Taylor, and Floyd created momentum for initiatives toward racial equity and justice. And while our activism was often subject to stable streaming connections, there was tangible momentum and a belief that new policies to inform more equitable and just practices would be codified.

And then the backlash began.

Notably, when we spoke with Kimberlé Crenshaw nearly two years later in spring 2022, she shared that, as the protests continued to unfold across the summer of 2020, she had

already been anticipating the backlash. At the time, however, our small team was focused on staying safe from the pandemic - in a state that interpreted COVID restrictions as infringement on people's rights - and on moving toward change as fast as possible while attention on the protests made it possible. As we talked about the compression the protests created, we felt an urgency to the work. Had we been asked about the backlash that summer, we would have agreed it was on the horizon. But none of us expected it to take the form of a direct attack on critical race theory or the CRTSI.

In the winter of 2020, as the anti-CRT movement began to take shape, the leadership team for the 2021 institute (now faculty from multiple departments as well as graduate students in cultural and social foundations of education, special education, and social work) revived our work. Despite our proximity (less than a quarter mile) to the statehouse grounds where anti-CRT sentiment was brewing, we were striving to create a meaningful virtual engagement for the summer of 2021. While the South Carolina legislature introduced six anti-truth, anti-LGBT, and anti-CRT bills, we garnered sponsorship for the institute from the College of Education's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the Center for Innovation in Higher Education, and the Department of Educational Studies, along with an anonymous donor. With their support fellowships were created and additional guest activist-scholars were invited to co-facilitate. All total, the financial donations enabled 25 teachers and graduate students to attend the CRTSI at no cost. While many hailed from South Carolina, others joined us from Colorado, New Hampshire, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

Across the institute, we designed all workshops to center participant engagement. We included topics specifically identified by

past participants and addressed new areas of interest identified by current graduate students and educators. We decided that the opening night should feature a talk by visionaries in the field, who were current leading scholars. The second day's session would include workshops on critical policy analysis, intersectionality, Asian Critical Theory (Asian Crit); CRT and Disability Studies (DisCrit), Latina/o Critical Theory, (LatCrit), and Tribal Critical Theory (TribalCrit). Other sessions would address CRT's connections to the civil rights movement and still others delved into specific theoretical concepts and methodologies from CRT. We designed sessions on CRT and teacher education, and CRT and higher education specifically for teachers, educators, and academics. And, as in 2019, there was radical play.

As we neared the institute's start and registration closed, we were elated to see the number of registrants had more than tripled since 2019. However, two days before the institute's start, a group of conservative Republican legislators learned of the CRTSI and threatened to start a campaign to "defund" our university if we did not re-open registration and allow them to participate in the institute. Without any support from university leadership to do otherwise, we felt coerced into providing access for a Republican state representative and staffer to register. A Democratic state representative also registered.

As a result, we had to notify all institute participants that conservative representatives likely would be present at our gathering (See Figure 2: Email draft to participants). And while almost all of those who registered still attended, a handful felt too unsafe to join us. And for good reason². Almost 100 participants joined us for the opening session on June 3, 2021, during which Dr. Daniel Solórzano and

² Noting who was in attendance, the Republican staffer contacted one participant's supervisor to

inquire if they were aware that one of their employees was attending the institute.

Dr. Lindsay Pérez Huber, who served as the Institute's 2021 CRT Visionary Leaders, discussed their book, *Racial Microaggressions: Using Critical Race Theory to Respond to Everyday Racism*. The second day featured both introductory and advanced workshops as well as salons with CRT scholar-activists during which participants discussed critical race praxis and community building.

Figure 2 Draft of Email to Registered Participants

Dear CRTSI Participants,

On June 1, 2021, the University of South Carolina received a request to re-open registration (which had closed May 27) to the CRT Summer Institute. The request came from a South Carolina legislator who contacted our University's Director of State Government Relations. This morning, June 2, the CRT Summer Institute Leadership Team was strongly advised to comply with this request. At this time, we have one confirmed legislator registered and anticipate one more for whom notification is pending.

First and foremost, we share the information with you for the sake of transparency - so you may reflect on your choice to attend the Institute. We do certainly hope you will join us; however, we fully understand if you choose not to do so. Second, our experience offers up another example of how CRT work is framed in particular geo-political contexts, such as South Carolina, underscoring a point made by several CRT scholars that this work is always ongoing and inter-generational.

Given the change in dynamics, we ask that you think about whether or not you would like to use an alias once you are admitted into CRTSI workshop sessions. In Zoom you can re-name yourself. Also, we offer as a reminder that if any participant chooses to save a chat in any given session, one-to-one chat ("private") messages are saved along with public chat messages.

It is our hope the CRTSI is a place of community building and networking as well as scholarly engagement. With that in mind, the Leadership Team will set up an invitation to Slack for those of you interested in ongoing conversation and engagement between our annual Institutes. If you are interested in an invite to Slack, please email us at CRTSI@mailbox.sc.edu

On a lighter note, CRTSI T-shirts are in the mail and you should receive yours soon!

Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your interest in the CRTSI!

There were also break-out sessions for affinity groups, opportunities for people to meet and talk, listen to music, and engage as community. Indeed, given the presence of 'foxes' in our proverbial 'henhouse', it became even more vital for us to ensure that we held space for joy in the work. And we did, but the impact of those efforts was difficult to assess

The presence of conservative oppositionists throughout the entire second day

made the experience one in which no one felt authorized to be their authentic self. We knew that we were being watched - that the community that we had worked so hard to build had been infiltrated. And so, we 'performed' to the best of our ability and spoke truth despite potential consequences.

Conclusion

A democracy cannot thrive where power remains unchecked, and justice is reserved for a select few. Ignoring these cries and failing to respond to this movement is simply not an option — for peace cannot exist where justice is not served.

John Lewis, 2020

We view this special issue as an opportunity to grapple with the aftermath of both the institute itself and the continued attacks that seek to disparage leaders who advance equity, justice, and the entire field of CRT. The surveillance, not only at the institute but also in the weeks that followed the institute in the form of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests of faculty emails (including all accompanying attachments) of those of us involved in co-directing/co-facilitating the institute and the absence of support from USC leadership had an impact on our professional *and* personal lives. Having put some distance between us and the 2021 CRTSI, we have endeavored here to situate and contextualize the remaining articles in which our colleagues offer their reflections and efforts to make meaning of the institute. Through the process of writing and reflecting on those events and what has transpired since, we hope to arrive at greater clarity regarding the future of the CRTSI, or more precisely, if it has one."

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Why We Can't Wait in 2023 - The Summers of our Renewed Discontent

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*"the academic study of race has always been
inextricably intertwined with political struggles"*

Robin D. G. Kelley (2000)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was born out of the lived experiences of Black folks in America, a history rooted in progress within and despite of oppressive environments. CRT represents the evolution of Black radical tradition, inclusive of theories or onto-epistemological ways of knowing that are evolutions of radical theories. Over twenty years ago, historian, Robin D. G. Kelley (2000) argued that great minds like Richard Wright, C.L.R. James, and W. E. B. DuBois, often credited as the forebearers of contemporary Black radical thought did not create the theory of Black radicalism as much as found it ... in the mass movements of Black people. He goes on to make the case that Black radical thought is anchored by nearly five centuries of resistance to their subjugation.

Similarly, CRT in higher education seeks to disrupt the deficit majoritarian narratives about the nature and capabilities of students of Color, while simultaneously seeking to dismantle systems that oppress underrepresented students and their communities. CRT in education illuminates structural inequities and challenges us to reimagine the institution of education as providing a more just educational experience for all.

The Catalyst for our Discontent

The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd during the spring of 2020 served as the catalyst for the summer of our renewed discontent in 2020. The Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) began in 2013 from the outcries of three young adult Black women at the impasse of continued racialized police brutality. Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi (Howard, 2023), as representation of the nation's young, diverse Millennial and Gen Z generations, galvanized BLM as it reached new heights of public awareness during the protests of 2020. Amidst a global health pandemic as a backdrop, these young generations have converged on America's streets to demonstrate their commitment to fundamental civil and human rights for Black Americans and other marginalized persons.

Due to interest convergence³, American higher education and its leadership face an internal and external reckoning to make their institutions just and equitable while providing an authentically diverse educational experience for their students, our future leaders. The co-directors/co-facilitators of the CRTSI attempted to do so by hosting a summer learning institute for scholars and those in the broader community seeking to advance their understanding and application of CRT as an academic research tool and interpretive lens. The Critical Race Theory Summer Institute (CRTSI) was intended to serve as a small informal gathering of learned friends

³ Interest convergence, theorized by Derrick Bell, purports that the rights of Black people only advance when they converge with the interests of white

people. Bell offered the theory as a rebuttal to the neutrality principle supposedly undergirding the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

and colleagues. Despite the widespread misnomers and public backlash against CRT, we understood those naysayers were steeped in misinformation based on the political pandering and legislative bills being passed as referenced in this special issue (Anders & Bryan 2024). The year 2020 provided us with 20/20 vision and clarity on the state of racial affairs and race relations in the United States of America. The year 2021 provided us with front-row seats to the vitriol, intimidation tactics, and political leadership pressures to retreat. The racialized and politicized attacks leading up to the Summer 2021 CRTSI Institute renewed our discontent.

CRTSI in Retrospect

In our planning of the CRT Summer Institute, we made several decisions aimed at cultivating a small close-knit community of scholars through the CRTSI. The conference was held during the height of the pandemic. As a result, the conference was to be held online, and like the previous iteration, took place in the summer. Our target audience was graduate students, but more specifically, the institute was geared towards doctoral students; our participants were educators, teachers, coaching teachers, faculty, and graduate students – with some holding dual roles. Some of us believed we could have a much larger institute, but we were all concerned about the growing, politically motivated, misinformation campaign against CRT and topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The ongoing misinformation campaign was only beginning to pick up momentum during the time we were planning, and it was clear that the threats against our work were serious. As a group, we reached a consensus to have a pared-down institute by using protective tactics like limiting our promotion of the institute, capping the registration, and offering scholarships for those who did not have funding support. Still, somehow, we ended up on the radar of conservative politicians. The Republican legislators learned about the CRTSI and

demanded to be admitted to the institute despite the institute being only days away and registration already closed. We initially stalled the request for admission but later agreed to admit them to avoid a “Defund USC” campaign that would target the entire university. However, we requested that friendly legislators also be admitted. We received underwhelming support from the university administration...except for the Chief Diversity Officer who gave impassioned remarks about the importance of these workshops and the importance of academic freedom in the opening address to the institute. The environment of our previous conferences had been vibrant and upbeat – community-oriented and a safe space for learning and expression. This time, there was a palpable chilling effect on the overall conference. We knew Republican legislators, or their staffers were lurking, listening, recording, waiting for a misstep, or anything that could be used to cast us in an unfavorable light.

We nonetheless treated the interlopers the same way we treated every participant. We gave them opportunities to introduce themselves, ask questions, and participate fully. They declined every opportunity and lurked, silently observing. From that, we knew that they were not there to gain a clearer understanding of Critical Race Theory through a participant-observer role. Naturally, we felt vulnerable with legislators in the room, and leading the section virtually heightened that vulnerability because we understood they were likely recording everything we said, and they were looking to ‘catch us slipping.’ In the back of our minds, we wondered if they were googling every participant to see who was under contract, who was on leave, who was using “company time,” where they worked, and what they did for a living. The eyes of the anti-truth legislators were fixed on us.

As university faculty in the 21st century, we are not naïve; we understand that anytime we teach or present our work bad actors could record us looking for ways to take our words out of context and use them against us. But this felt

different. As legislators they can make life difficult for us and our colleagues in a myriad of ways, including attacking our livelihoods, and the institution of tenure with CRT as the pretext.

After the conference, we never heard from them again about the conference but that is not to say they cannot or will not bring it up later. As Anders and Bryan (2024) highlighted, other coercive and intimidation tactics were utilized including: FOIA; listing faculty names, courses, and affiliations in Congressional letters; state legislative bills listing faculty names; and DEI programming and funding audits.

Based upon the way they demanded to be included in the institute, the Republican legislators' presence and intent was hostile. Their hostility elevated to intimidation as they refused to engage in the sessions they attended. In the online meeting space, Republican legislators or their staffers did not turn their cameras or microphones on, did not introduce themselves, did not participate in any activities or discussions. We believe they came expecting to hear us say comments such as those shared in some media outlets. For example, we imagine that they expected a centering of whiteness and oppression. If that is what they expected, then they were disappointed; we hope they received a re-education about what CRT represents. Although the presence of the legislators did dampen the overall spirit of the conference early on, the co-directors/co-facilitators proceeded with the institute exactly as we originally planned. It was full of joy, laughter, learning, and community. Our souls could not and would not be broken.

Critical Moments

We use an interdisciplinary lens to help explain, illustrate, and represent our reflections, recollections, and critical moments of the CRTSI as we make sense and meaning of our collective experiences.

For Simone, the critical moment was witnessing the upcoming generation of students

and future faculty understand their role in challenging intimidation and injustice. When we explained to the CRTSI registrants that there would be political attendees, we were surprised that many of them did not cancel their registrations. They were not afraid but rather were affirming to us and each other that we needed to stand firm and stand up to such tactics and injustices. Students relayed various strategies to protect themselves amidst the interlopers – protect their identity, their affiliations, their funding, and their employment as all of these came to be under fire. As a facilitator, their actions affirmed my willingness to stand firm in my beliefs about the continued fight for equity and the value of what we were teaching. You cannot have theory without practice (Hampton, 1969) and this was our moment to apply what we were teaching.

In this moment, it is important to acknowledge the unspoken rule that to succeed, one is expected to maintain a certain level of respectability – the model-minoritized other (Chow, 2017). These unspoken expectations, racialized narratives, perceived stereotypes are simultaneously akin to historical and current instruments of domination and inequality within social class, wealth, and opportunities, and have been a source of intergenerational trauma. Students from the Millennial and Gen-Z generations are much less conciliatory than generations prior, questioning the status quo, refusing to be type-casted and are unapologetically outspoken while commanding mass appeal and galvanizing support through social networks and media.

In the words of Bayard Rustin, “if *kids* can revitalize the civil rights movement in Birmingham, the least we can do is act like men and women and fight now to provide them with a decent future” (Rustin, 1963, p.8). The students that attended CRTSI understood the mood, the tactics, and the battlefield before them. I stand in solidarity with them, refusing to be contained and taking full ownership of my educational experience. On the campus of Howard

University in 1963, James Baldwin made a call to action, “it is the responsibility of the Negro writer to excavate the real history of this country . . . to tell us what really happened to get us where we are now. We must tell the truth till we can no longer bear it.” In their spirit, I take up the charge by declaring our experiences in our scholarly fight against racism, underscoring the contemporary outlay of historical backlash and intimidation tactics, and yet, still press forward and declare victory.

For Spencer, the entire experience was a critical moment. While I am not inclined to be silent or run from a challenge, I recognize that there can be wisdom in a quieter approach. As a team, we came to the decision that the best strategy for continuing the institute was to take a low-key approach. However, in my opinion, none of those strategies benefited us. As academics in higher education, we must understand that we cannot hide. We cannot be quiet. Our silence will not save us. Our communities need to hear our voices and need to feel our support. Those of us who are tenured have a special obligation to stand up and speak truth to power. After all, one of the primary purposes of tenure is to ensure the academic freedom of the faculty in their teaching and research. Considering the fact that our CRT scholarship is indeed in the public domain, when we are silent on important matters, it doesn't save us. It discredits us. Although we do not need the institutions of higher education to legitimize our work, it is the environment in which we choose to work.

James Baldwin recounted meeting Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy with Lorraine Hansbury for over two hours in the 1960s. According to Baldwin, at the close of the meeting Hansbury stated, “Mr. Attorney General, I am very worried about the state of a civilization which produces that white cop standing on that Negro woman's neck in Birmingham” (Saucedo, 2007, p.93). Over 50 years later, another white cop was caught on camera kneeling on the neck for over nine minutes until he killed another

Black man in the street. Just a few months later politicians had forgotten the incident but remembered the subsequent protests. They decided not to focus on the brutality Black folks are facing but chose to direct their focus to eliminating Black history, teaching about race, gender, and anything that they could lump under an umbrella they called Critical Race Theory in public primary and secondary schools and increasingly in higher education. Our silence will not save us. Our silence only betrays our gift and our communities.

CRT Matters in Higher Education because of Scholar Activism, Protests, and Retrenchment

The lethal events leading up to the 2020 BLM protests also spurred internal friction within various organizations, including institutions of higher education, as many rushed to publicize diversity and inclusion statements, DEI commitments, and DEI practices. American institutions went about auditing, reflecting, and overhauling age-old structures that uphold white supremacy and systemic racism, and the leaders of this generation seemed committed to working to uplift, include, and learn from this social justice movement. However, while institutional leaders proudly proclaimed Black Lives Matter publicly, employees of these systemically racialized institutions reminded the leaders that they did not practice what they preached. We must move beyond blanket value statements and tokenism within the leadership ranks and away from false realities of diversity success. This is especially problematic in higher education spaces that are intended to be welcoming to all, particularly for those whose origins and practices have mirrored the racial inequities and injustices interwoven in the history of the United States. Placating diversity statements and allyship practices, whether deliberate or unconscious, have the effect of pacifying the masses who seek progress. The anti-CRT backlash (retrenchment) we are up against in the aftermath of Obama's

election (progress) is reminiscent of Jim Crow (retrenchment) after Reconstruction (progress). The current retrenchment we are experiencing with anti-diversity, equity and inclusion efforts writ large, and anti-CRT are akin to the backdoor, subtle discrimination policies that followed the Civil Rights Movement and policies like the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965⁴. In the epilogue, Gause and Bryan (2024) expand on our period of retrenchment post institute.

According to Crenshaw (1988), the period of retrenchment (e.g., the backlash, undermining, and pushback) always follows periods of enlightenment (e.g., calls for racial equity, reparations, and collective accord). One such episode of racial retrenchment is the aggressive legislative agenda nationwide proffering anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) laws and regulations. Another example is the systematic and direct attacks aimed at banning books at the K-12 level and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in higher education. The CRT Summer Institute (CRTSI) is one such event that took a small community-based learning environment to dive deeply into the tenets of CRT to broaden the understanding of its college faculty, educators, and graduate student participants. While detractors, like our CRTSI interlopers, are quick to point out and distort the CRT tenets, they fail to acknowledge or understand that as much as CRT was born out of the everyday lived experiences of Black folks, CRT is about helping folks resist oppression however it is presented to them.

In retrospect, the moment for institutional diversity statements and the recommitments to creating more inclusive environments was short-lived. Governors and higher education Boards of Trustees have seemingly turned sharply away from such efforts. States, led by Texas and Florida, are banning Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices and AP African American

History Courses. Within higher education we have our own examples of racial disharmony and discontent. In North Carolina and Texas, higher education leaders have recently blocked the hiring of several high-profile Black professors. Several southern states have threatened to withhold any funding appropriated for any DEI efforts they have falsely labeled as indoctrination. In response, young adults are protesting injustices on their college campuses.

CRT Matters in Higher Education because of Students Turned Activists

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation survey, 52 % of all adult protesters in the summer of 2020 have been between the ages of 18 and 29 (Hamel et.al., 2020). One in 10 Americans say they have attended a protest against police violence or in support of the Black Lives Matter movement (Hamel et.al., 2020). The protestors are most likely to be young adults and college-educated (Hamel et.al., 2020). Throughout history, college age young adults have often played critical roles in spurring social change in America. For example, SNCC's Diane Nash led the Nashville sit-ins at the age of 22. The late John Lewis was 23 years old when he spoke at the March on Washington in 1963. Outspoken activist Angela Davis became a UCLA professor at the age of 25. As intergenerational social movements and activism continues, it is the 18-29 age group that higher education must prepare to lead us to a more equitable future. These facts are not lost on those who oppose and distort Critical Race Theory. In fact, it is *because* such a young, multiracial, multiethnic, coalition of young people came together that they are on this McCarthyist quest to crush Critical Race Theory and the concept of tenure itself. Rachel Dolezal, the white female professor who facilitated the most egregious form of cultural misappropriation

⁴ The HEA was originally passed in 1965 as a way to make higher education more accessible to more people. It includes the entire financial aid

system as well as civil rights policies designed to make public colleges and universities inclusive and welcoming to all students.

in recent memory, lied about having black heritage for the entirety of her higher education faculty career (Johnson et.al., 2015). Dolezal's lies were uncovered by one of her students who relentlessly pursued the truth. This exemplifies Frantz Fanon's understanding in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the "black soul is the white man's artifact," (1967, p.14).

Masquerading as the oppressed, the cultural charlatan sought solace from her privilege, secured access to unique equity-driven opportunities otherwise already available to her and profited from the false narrative co-opted through professional and cultural credibility. Yet still, the unmasking of this charade was led by an emerging young professional of Color who had the wherewithal to interrogate the inconsistencies presented. But there is a world of difference between appreciating a culture or aligning with it politically and insisting you somehow embody it — even more, that you might do so better than Black people themselves. According to Fanon (1967), the present will always contribute to the building of the future. Likewise, as current scholar-activists, and future leaders, we might take a moment to consider what about our society, our institutions, produces and craves such imposters while simultaneously ignoring and erasing other, more complex portrayals of Blackness and other racial identities.

CRT Matters in Higher Education because of Threats to Access & Equity

The unintended consequences of the 2020 racial reckoning are when Black people and other people of Color across the country are once again bearing the burden of white privilege, white fragility, white guilt, and white rage. The many requests to serve on newly founded diversity committees, leading training/debriefing sessions,

or doing diversity-minded outreach, is not a new phenomenon but is amplified within the current climate. People of Color are being asked to give hundreds of hours of unpaid labor in the name of inclusion, collaboration and allyship — as if their ancestors have not toiled enough without pay. The surging requests and stances of allyship are well-meaning, yet overwhelming. Similarly, mounting demands for racial equality and accountability in the workplace amid the 2020 summer of discontent have led several corporate CEOs and leaders spanning media, tech, creative spaces, beauty industries and politics to resign from their positions, with many asking for their successors to be people of Color. While these actions attempt to minimize the racial imbalance in leadership representation, we must bear in mind that conversations about individual identity and choice should not obscure the more important conversation about justice and structural racism, which is fundamentally not about individual choice. And yet, we examine hate as if it is an individual act rather than focus on systemic discrimination leading to hate (Kendi, 2016). Hate is not inborn, in fact, it demands an active existence and is cultivated through appropriate actions and behaviors that ultimately produce hatemongers. We saw the hatemongering and intimidation tactics firsthand in the politically driven response and attention the institute and its co-directors/co-facilitators received. Furthermore, the threats to racial equity continued at state and national levels. For example, the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* in 2023 to overturn affirmative action is a calculated move to reposition whiteness⁵ as the dominant force. For higher education admissions, this will undoubtedly impact the demographic profile of

⁵ According to Harris (1993), Whiteness functions as property to confer benefits to White people - benefits that have been historically and presently protected in American law. See Harris (1993) for more information and full article.

Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as Property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707–1791.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787>

the college student population – which is part of the opposition’s retrenchment efforts.

Stay Woke, Don’t Wait!

Arguably one of the greatest hip-hop musicians ever, Nasir Jones, better known as Nas stated, “I never sleep because sleep is the cousin of death” (Nas, 2022). Detractors of CRT fail to acknowledge the importance of being “woke” for marginalized communities. They argue that being “woke” is intended to accrue political gains and power through political correctness and policing their whitewashed histories, language, thoughts, behaviors, and actions. But in fact, for us scholar-activist, being “woke” or ‘paying attention’ is not overtly political; our very survival depends on and is rooted in being vigilant, lest we get ‘caught slipping,’ or unaware of the continual subvert and overt threats against us.

For higher education organizations, the administration and leadership should talk to their employees of Color first, before that Black Lives Matter press release goes public. You cannot begin or purport to combat the system if you haven’t addressed matters within your own network. Allyships need to actively push toward anti-racism and anti-discrimination. Doing better means cleaning up your own house, confronting inherent biases, and having difficult conversations within our personal and professional networks. Even in the face of diversity, there is adversity when it comes to anti-racist ideals as racism is both systemic and personal.

Much like the first Civil Rights Movement, this “Second Wave” of racial liberation movement also played out on the international stage, with nation states signifying their solidarity with the Movement. Eerily familiar to King’s assessment of the Civil Rights Movement, the current BLM movement is “disturbing the tranquility of the nation until the existence of injustice is

recognized as a virulent disease menacing the whole society, and is cured” (King, p.121). We will not be moved from teaching, understanding, and utilizing CRT as a tool, a strategy, a methodology to eradicate systemic racism and institutionalized prejudices. With the temerity of our ancestors, the extraordinary spirit of courage of our forebearers, and the indiscriminate determination of our elders, we WILL continue to get into ‘good trouble’ as John Lewis implored us to do.

Why We Can’t Wait

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Why We Can’t Wait* (1963), was a timely and timeless introspection and interrogation of the tumultuous struggles for civil rights as human rights. Dr. King demonstrably explained the events, forces, and pressures in the quest for civil rights from 1962-1963. In our own context of the CRTSI, here we are 60 years later, explaining our own struggles – the events, forces, and pressures in this technological age of oppression and supremacist ideologies. These forces and pressures are germane today as they were then. For us as black scholars in the academy, the struggle continues. Much like our students stood their ground against those seeking to intimidate us at the CRTSI, we as faculty stand in solidarity with them as agents and allies in their graduate education. Our silence will not bring about change or success or bring out our maturation as political or moral activists. Neither will such silence help us to teach those coming after us. As Dr. King alluded to, the days to come will require leadership that is persistent and aggressive yet disciplined, not one of divisiveness or neutrality. We will not run from the struggle and will continue to support the battle for equity--one summer institute at a time.

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Resisting Fear: An Introspective Dialogue on Coalition Building in South Carolina

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The custom of reflective praxis among minoritized peoples sustains our teaching and learning as individuals in coalition who seek conscientização [i.e., critical consciousness] for our community (Boveda & Bhattacharya, 2019; Jenkins, 2019). Cabrera (2018) clarifies the utility of conscientização as collective action stating:

Freire (2000) argued that the oppressed are initially blinded to the realities of their own marginalization via hegemonic structuring, and it is through the process of conscientização that they learn to both see themselves as oppressed while also exploring the potential for collective action to transform their material conditions.

Furthermore, Wing (2003) draws on the importance of collective action and coalitions as tools of critical race praxis working toward common interests. Critical race praxis requires communities to engage in “critical, pragmatic, social-legal analysis” and political community organizing to actualize “antibordination practice” (Yamamoto, 1997). Challenges to coalitions producing conscientização exist in the history of resistance to Black and Brown social action, including knowledge production that works toward creating an equitable multi-racial democracy (López & Sleeter, 2023; Martínez et al., 2019). These attacks include the current critical race theory (CRT) critiques, which permeate the national public education discourse (Henry et al., 2023).

In this manuscript, I illuminate one state-level example of opposition to conscientização emerging from political scrutiny of CRT and critical race praxis in South Carolina’s public education system. I interrogate and problematize

the methods by which the South Carolina General Assembly sought to degrade public education and educators with specific attention to attacks on the teaching of South Carolina’s history and what they perceive as Critical Race Theory. Drawing on personal narratives, I then offer a first-person account of a critical moment shaped by a coalition in South Carolina to highlight how critical moments inform critical race praxis.

I begin with an overview of the current politics of education in South Carolina and highlight South Carolina’s attempts to shape pedagogy and content that address racism and discrimination embedded in institutional structures and the repeated use of fear as a tactic to dehumanize educators and administrators in South Carolina.

In the next section, I describe the gathering of a coalition that the South Carolina General Assembly forcibly infiltrated but failed to disrupt. Throughout this section, I invoke personal reflection to highlight the importance of coalition building and critical moments as mosaics of action rather than monoliths in a time, place, and space. This approach is important for three reasons.

First, it is essential to recognize that critical moments often exist in retrospect of the time they occur, and documenting this history is vital to informing subsequent critical actions or coalitions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2021).

Second, acknowledging challenges to critical race praxis helps to foreground subsequent attacks and, in the context of this manuscript, helps contextualize the attacks on CRT in public education directed through South Carolina state policy that is unlikely to subside.

Finally, I position this manuscript as a call to all allies of public education statewide and nationally. Our teachers need your support, our

communities need your support, and our students desperately need your support.

Legislating Fear: Anti-Critical Race Theory as Policy

In the 124th Legislative Session of 2021-2022, South Carolina proposed several bills targeting educational content related to critical race theory (CRT). Among the collection of bills, HB 4325 (2021) prohibits content that “directs or otherwise compels students to personally affirm, adopt, or adhere to the tenets of critical race theory.” HB 4325 proffers a misrepresentative interpretation of CRT, the written work that grounds CRT, and the development of CRT as a legal framework and intersectional racial justice movement. HB 4325 does not help non-CRT experts understand the nuances of CRT (*for further reading see* Bell, 1992; Bell, 2004; Crenshaw, 1988; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Harris, 1995; Matsuda, 1995). Instead, HB 4325 outlines an inaccurate and accusatory perspective about CRT as a medium for people to blame themselves for historical actions they did not commit nor individually control. The approach of HB 4325 is similar to legislation across the country (Henry et al., 2023).

During this same Session, the South Carolina General Assembly proposed HB 4343 (2021), *The Academic Integrity Act*, which explicitly prohibits using Nikole Hannah-Jones’ award-winning anthology, the “1619 Project”. HB 4343 suggested decreased funding for non-compliant districts, levies for hosting professional development grounded in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and threatened new curricular and content mandates, such as the public posting of instructional materials and curricula. HB 4343 also proposed stricter oversight of federal grants, and a public platform for parent and student complaints regarding the curriculum.

Subsequently, HB 4605 (2022) recommends decreasing resource and funding availability for those districts that do not comply

with the curriculum restrictions proposed by the General Assembly. SB 534 (2021) constricts United States history including the teaching of global colonization and Indigenous genocide, and slavery-Reconstruction-Jim Crow (*for further reference see* HB 4392 (2021); HB 4799 (2022)). The final budget appropriations bill H4100 (2022) includes proviso H630 (2022), which adopted the prohibitory language of the previous policies (*see section 1.105 H630 (2022) Proviso 1B*). In whole, the General Assembly’s 124th Session targeted transformative, equity-grounded dialogue and instruction.

As with policies of the past (*see the South Carolina Negro Act of 1740*) in which South Carolina prohibited enslaved peoples from learning to read, write, and assemble (Hale, 2021), the current proposed legislation attempts to prohibit students from reading, writing, and learning that helps to assert the humanity of minoritized people and conscientização as a racially just community practice. Public education policies similar to South Carolina’s often invoke fear as a tactic to reduce the power of coalitions.

Fear as a Policy Instrument

In the policy landscape, methods of interference, community division, and fear investiture exist to oppress social movements (Martínez & Vazquez-Heilig, 2022; Martínez & Spikes, 2020). The contemporary legislative educational policy agenda of South Carolina is part of that investiture and includes the use of policy to resist and suppress conscientização (Smith et al., 2022; Tran et al., 2022). Through policy, South Carolina targets knowledge that provides minoritized communities, and their allies, with the architecture for conscientização and liberation (Martínez et al., 2023).

Each independent action to oppress liberation intertwines with previous actions (Fede, 2017; Martínez et al., 2023; Thompson, 1993). South Carolina’s current policy agenda attempts to generate fear and inhibits our

children's ability to discuss the unadulterated history of South Carolina, the United States, and the world, including the inhumanity of colonization, genocide, enslavement, Jim Crow, and the use of state-sanctioned violence against people of color (Thomas, 2019). Thus, I seek to uphold the sanctity of our public education system and challenge the policy of fear in South Carolina, using a first-person narrative format to document my reflections about public education in South Carolina that persists despite the restrictive policy environment. [Editor's note: The first-person narrative is full column-width and in italics.]

Routes to Critical Moments Through Coalitional Roots

Although the situation of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanizing totality affecting both the oppressors and those whom they oppress, it is the latter who must, from their stifled humanity, wage for both, the struggle for a fuller humanity; the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle

- Paulo Freire (2018a)

To invoke conscientização as a practice, communities require knowledge that catalyzes dialogue and confronts social, political, and economic inequities (Freire, 2018a). Ascension of conscientização, combined with action against those institutions that proliferate oppression, helps to support transformative community models where participation, freedom, and a multi-racial democracy are the norm. By restricting CRT, the General Assembly obstructs the realization of a multi-racial democracy and the proliferation of conscientização. The summer of 2021 defined many critical moments within the tensions for equity and liberty as advocates generated critical race praxis. In South Carolina, a coalition engaged in conscientização confronted the remnants of South Carolina's history.

Freire's quote represents the foundation of how I embody liberation and my participation in coalitions. Life, no one's life, is easy, but some of us have the absolute privilege of resistance, or belonging in coalitions of resistance, or finding love and compassion in our stifled humanity and the stifled humanity of our community. I attribute my belief in liberation, and manifestations of liberation, to my parents' experiences as immigrants to the United States. My parents struggled through constant threats of criminalization. However, there is no doubt that they engaged in coalition and resistance, and that I am part of that history. That power supports my action in coalitions that continue to nourish my humanity and liberation. This includes the spaces that have included me in South Carolina. Now I ask myself, what am I doing to support my community to scale up the miracle of our work and liberation in the world?

A Method of Reflective Resistance

As a method of resistance and self-defense, coalitions working in authentic and artful spaces instigate liberation (Martínez, 2021; Pozzebon et al., 2014; Walby, 2001). For instance, a coalition of 81 enslaved peoples marched from South Carolina to Florida during the Stono Rebellion (1739), a banner reading "Liberty!" capitalizing their path. Osceola and John Horse led a coalition to fight for their freedom in Florida (Porter, 1943; Porter, 2017; Tucker, 1992). The Underground Railroad was a national coalition working as a network toward emancipation (Ortiz, 2005; Russell, 2001). These coalitions of action informed the civil rights movement, the United Farm Workers Movement, and current activist movements (Spady, 2022). In the myriad of activism and coalition building, opportunities to engage in the work of liberation locally can inform national movements (Capizzo & Madden, 2022; Suarez, 2023). In South Carolina, the Critical Race Theory Summer Institute (CRTSI) illustrates a local coalition of action that may inform national action.

Established in 2019, the CRTSI is an initiative and forum that provides a two-day

opportunity for educators to interrogate CRT as a blueprint for engaging in conscientização in a community setting. The CRTSI supports the learning and preparation of advocates by providing structured learning opportunities, dialogical reflexivity, research, evaluation, and abolitionist community engagement. Through concurrent introductory and advanced workshops on critical race history, theories, methodologies, and goal setting/planning/action for research and praxis, the CRTSI disrupts oppressive policy, discourse, and action. At the outset, the CRTSI intends to encourage national coalitions of activists to engage in their own localized critical moments.

I arrived at the University of South Carolina in August of 2018. I'd never lived in the Dixie South, and being Mexican, coming from the North, and living only in major cities, I was apprehensive about engaging with coalitions in this new space. I knew coalitions work in and around Columbia, the Midlands, and South Carolina. I recognized that South Carolina has one of the strongest and oldest coalition networks in the United States, and understood that I had so much to learn about the place and space before I could provide support. I also understood that family would find me if I lived my authentic self.

To that end, I was included in critical conversations in my department by Drs. Simone Gause and Spencer Platt (to name a few), and throughout the College of Education by Drs. Daniella Cook, Michelle Bryan, and Allison Anders. Despite not being one of the original collaborators of the CRTSI in 2019, I felt enveloped in the strength of their community. As a new graduate, starting a new job, in a new place, with a young family, my fear and apprehension quickly faded within the armor of this coalition. Instead of retracting, putting my head down, and being afraid, I felt emboldened! For almost two years, I built my knowledge of South Carolina's networks, how our communities were connected, and my understanding of the state's educational policy and political environment.

In the summer of 2021, the CRTSI again engaged with the ethic of coalition to resisted educational persecution focused on CRT and educational justice. For decades, legislators at the

state and federal level have discouraged educators from providing their students critically conscious, race-based content that grapples with the history of violence against people of color (Stout & Lemee, 2021). South Carolina is no different. Of distinction, however, in the summer of 2021, is the South Carolina Legislature's targeting of our community. Detailed in additional manuscripts of this volume, members of the South Carolina legislature threatened to censure the coordinators of the CRTSI if they were not allowed to monitor the two-day institute.

The political environment evolved quickly once the pandemic came and went. I saw my colleagues and peers mobilize just as quickly. I was invited to participate in the CRTSI steering committee and coordinate two sessions on CRT methodologies, one with Daniella and one with Michelle. I was thankful for the opportunity, and once again, despite the apprehension around me, I felt emboldened. I didn't see my colleagues, the people I trusted to keep me safe in this new environment, hold back from critiquing the South Carolina General Assembly and the policies they were drafting. Despite personal and professional attacks, none of the CRTSI steering committee shrunk. Instead, this family who enveloped me into their coalition engaged in action that was demonstrative and deliberate! There was such a synergy to how the CRTSI steering committee engaged in our collective action, and the level of coordination and purposefulness set up the impetus for my critical moment; coalitions, your community, your family, will always support you, and they will always help to guide you away from danger, and we don't have to purposefully put ourselves our families', lives, or the lives of our community under duress to achieve our goals. It's best to plan.

Throughout the two-day excursion, expert researchers and pedagogues engaged the participants of the CRTSI. Daniella, Michelle, and I developed two sessions on CRT methodologies as a landscape and advanced course. Our goal was to provide the CRTSI participants with practical knowledge to support their efforts in their community. There was a fear that centered on the CRTSI, knowing that the South Carolina General Assembly delegates [or designated staffer. It was hard to know because delegate

names were on the screens but videos were off.] *were in our rooms, listening, waiting for us to create a sound bite they could use for political gain, but that moment and that sound bite never came. The legislative delegates remained silent when confronted with the empiricism and empathy of the moment of our coalition. To resist the legislative fear-mongering with acceptance, directly countered the Assembly staffers' likely expectation of fervor among the CRTSI coalition. For two days, we held the line, and in the aftermath, legislators engaged in many more personal and professional attacks on the coordinators of the CRTSI. Once again, I witnessed the quick mobilization of the coalition to support each other and the diligent planning that went into mediating the potential harm to ourselves.*

Political resistance against our critical race praxis attempted to stifle the humanity of a family engaged in solidarity in the CRTSI. Anti-liberation movements have always mobilized to stifle coalitions of resistance. In the summer of 2021, coalition members created their own critical moments. We stood in solidarity and opposition to our surveillance as a community, and this must be recognized as part of what makes activism so powerful- we stand together. In the remnants, continued attempts to stifle the humanity of South Carolina, and the United States, have dominated the political spectrum, and as is outlined above, the tactics of fear, policing, and threats of persecution have continued.

Through the discord, however, we continue to fight for liberation and coalitions nationally continue to do so. This avenue of hope to counter hate with expertise and solidarity continues as a protest of the hate and fear of South Carolina's political obstinance. We are not afraid. We have nothing to hide. We are experts. We are caring. We maintain artful and safe spaces to engage in

non-violent, fact-based, historically accurate discourse. Through resilience, we sow hope as a function of our actions!

Conclusion

Despite repeated assaults, coalitions engage in collective action for conscientização because of a commitment to continue building upon the sacrifice of our loved ones, family, elders, kin, and ancestors. As activists, we maintain our resolve to seek community-driven approaches to critical race praxis that produce a multi-racial democracy. It is important to re-engage the power of our community in modern-day struggles of liberation and document the history and work of coalitions. Many critical moments exist throughout the United States and the globe, and many coalitions are working to reconcile our past and present in pursuit of liberty (Graff, 2010).

In South Carolina, the spirit and work of the CRTSI persists, and the actions of 2021 continue to permeate our collective conscientização. Conscientização requires coalitions to invoke the spirit of liberation. The history of our struggle is not debatable, nor is the history of violence against our people. Liberation is created through coalition, despite fear and retribution. The process of liberation is ongoing, and the role of hegemony is to maintain its power and increase its magnitude. Thus, our role is to use our skills and excellence to overcome, circumvent, confront, gather, and cultivate. We are grateful and invigorated to engage in this work. We acknowledge and recognize the loss we have endured as a community in solidarity to get to this point. We hold our heads up high and applaud our community, we, us, in solidarity.

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Creating Critical Collective Art: Insights and Evocations Against “Hate Ideology, Ginned-up Propaganda, and Attacks on CRT”

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*In theory building, we argue and write.
In radical imagining toward our fullest
possibilities, we make art.
Mari Matsuda (“How did we save ourselves”)*

The representations in this article stem from collective composite reflections of critical moments (Delgado & Stefancic, 2021) created by the seven co-directors / co-facilitators of a critical race theory summer institute (CRTSI) organized and held in one of the 25 states that endures anti-truth and anti-diversity legislation and law (*The Chronicle*, 2024). Inspired and informed by ideas of group centered leadership, educating for equality, commitments to racial justice, and the organizing work of Ella Baker, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Highlander Folk School (now Highlander Research and Education Center), the institute was designed as a series of workshops crafted to invite conversation and imagine what could be next in work toward racial justice and equity (Carson, 1995; Horton, 1998, Payne, 1997). As Anders and Bryan (2024) detailed in the history of CRTSI in this special issue, students, staff, and faculty as well as community members were invited to attend.

After an introduction to the inspiration for the arts-based workshop at the CRTSI and a brief summary of the institute’s history and context, I offer a recounting of conservative legislators’ incursion on it and against its co-directors / co-facilitators in 2021, note some touchstones in literature about arts based inquiry and describe the methodology. A set of arts based representations from our collective work are represented throughout the article. Created

during a reunion of co-directors / co-facilitators in 2023, the representations nest around critical moments that we experienced collectively and individually before and after the 2021 institute (Delgado & Stefancic, 2021).

Amidst our inspirations for the kinds of institute workshops we offered is Mari Matsuda. Our workshop on art, inquiry, and critical race theory existed because her work, her art, and The Next Dada Utopian Peace Orchestra exists (Mari Matsuda Next Dada Utopian Visioning Peace Orchestra; Matsuda, 1987, 1991, 1993, 2015, 2017, 2018). A tenured professor of law, Matsuda also self identifies as an artist and scholar activist. Her pro bono work and activism has generated some of her most cited writing projects and legal analyses. Like other early critical race scholars, her work with community and justice movements was intertwined with academic representations of the work.

Mari Matsuda and Kimberlé Crenshaw also attended Harvard Law School together. In the early 1980s, they along with a few others organized and gathered some of the earliest groups of law students and law professors who studied race and the law (Crenshaw, 2002).

Matsuda shared:

In the early 1980’s there were almost no law professors of color. A few of us began meeting and theorizing about the dialectical relationship between white supremacy and the US legal system. We came out of freedom struggles, and we defined freedom broadly to include the end of all forms of subordination. We imagined a world in which all human beings are valued and upheld. Our teachers were generations of freedom

fighters before us and we took our genealogy seriously as we pushed, argued, cooked our way into a new mode of analysis called critical race theory. We were and are feminists, and when feminism met critical race theory, it expanded into intersectionality. (Mari Matsuda, “An Introduction: The Peace Orchestra Has an Intellectual Neighbor”)

Along with other law school students and law school professors, Matsuda and Crenshaw carried questions of race and the intersections of race and gender into critical legal studies (CLS) conferences and law journals. Informally caucusing at conferences, they organized panels to address the absence of such work both at CLS conferences and more broadly in legal studies. Questions from FemCrits, who were scholars studying feminist legal theory, and analyzing “law’s relationship to gender” (Crenshaw, 2002, 1360), informed their approaches to thinking about race and racism. They asked, what is law’s relationship to race? (Crenshaw, 2002). Intersectionality became one of their shared core ideas. Matsuda described critical connections across multiple, intersecting subordinated locations of oppression this way:

With Kimberlé Crenshaw slinging pots and pans in her kitchen I watched a new idea emerge: The systemic devaluation of our sister who is poor, Black, female, queer is not just a matter of one oppression piling on another. The entire structure of colonization finds its perpetual motion miracle by deploying interlocking subordination. Multiple oppressions supercharge the colonizer’s system, allowing it to morph and disrupt resistance at every turn, breaking our coalitions and occluding our thoughts. Freedom is not coming unless we take on the entire beast. (Matsuda, “An Introduction”)

Matsuda and Crenshaw engaged intersectionality not only in the analysis of anti-discrimination law but also in advancing the importance of coalition building (Crenshaw,

1989, 1991; Matsuda, 1991); and along with Charles Lawrence and Richard Delgado, they addressed myriad forms of intersectional discrimination, assaultive speech, and the first amendment (Matsuda et al., 1993).

A feminist, critical race theorist, and first tenured Asian American female law professor, Matsuda also is an artist. A reclaimed childhood passion surfaced as an adult and Matsuda began creating instruments from found objects. From scrapyards objects “recovered from the waste stream” (Matsuda, 2017, 1204) became some of the instruments she and others played in The Next Dada Utopian Peace Orchestra in 2015. Peace is possible, Matsuda shares. As she engages in work toward justice intellectually and artistically, she foregrounds the importance of art in moving us toward “our fullest possibilities.” Artistically, she foregrounds the importance of art: “We need beauty, joy, and surprise in our lives, and we are at our best when we work together for those things” (Mari Matsuda, “How did we save ourselves”). Matsuda refuses the destruction of oppression through the act of creating.

While the co-directors / co-facilitators did not then and I am not now comparing ourselves to Matsuda’s vision and artistry, we remain inspired by her and included a new workshop in the 2021 summer institute on art, inquiry, and CRT. We reached out to our colleagues, Dr. Peter Duffy and Dr. Jason Méndez to help us. Dr. Duffy, who is a professor and the director of the master of arts in teaching program in theatre education at the University of South Carolina often facilitated workshops on arts-based approaches to inquiry in the qualitative courses offered in the College of Education and has decades of experience with drama workshops, social justice and equity work. Dr. Méndez, who is a Boricua artist, poet, playwright, and performer as well as an educator co-founded Block Chronicles—a collection of documentary interviews with artists, educators, researchers, and community organizers working toward social justice—also had experience creating and leading

arts based workshops and programs for children and adults. Together Duffy, Méndez, and Anders designed an interactive workshop on “CRT, Art, and Inquiry” among other introductory and advanced workshops, salons, and spaces for affinity groups and for people to meet and debrief (for details see Anders & Bryan, 2024). The 2021 CRT Summer Institute started with a welcome from Dr. Julian Williams, USC’s Vice President of what was the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and now the Office of Access and Opportunity. Music infused the two-day event and one of our collective aims was to hold space for joy. And indeed, there was joy. But the institute was a complex space; other experiences arrived alongside joy.

The Institute: Local and National Context

The idea for a CRT institute stemmed from graduate student interest. Many students wanted to incorporate theoretical concepts from critical race theorists into their dissertations. Among them were students who also wanted to work with community and engage in critical race praxis. In early 2019 faculty in cultural and social foundations of education, teacher education, and higher education along with the associate dean of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the College of Education met to respond to their interests. The creation of a summer institute was one response. Taking seriously the role of community and praxis in CRT and group-centered organizing (Carson, 1995; Horton, 1998, Payne, 1997), we moved away from conventional conference designs and toward interactive spaces of collective knowledge production. A small group of 15 graduate students, staff, and faculty

gathered that first summer in 2019. The second institute planned for summer 2020 was cancelled in March of that year. Without funding to pivot toward a virtual platform, the global pandemic of covid-19 meant we turned our efforts toward summer 2021 (see further details in Anders & Bryan, 2024 this issue).

During the same time, the murder of Ahmaud Arbery and police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd ignited protests nationally and internationally against white supremacy, racism, and police violence against Black, Brown, and Tribal communities, and other communities of Color.⁶ In the U.S. the summer of 2020 was marked by the trauma and tragedy.

Before and after protests faculty and staff in the College of Education met virtually and talked about the compression the public outcry was creating. There was a multiracial, multigenerational movement underfoot, and we felt an urgency to put as many policies and practices in place that we could to ensure further work toward equity and in particular racial justice and equity. A broader contingency of faculty in our College was engaged in diversity education and workshops, including all of the associate deans -- not just the one leading our office of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Many of the co-directors / co-facilitators of the institute led new diversity initiatives, created new mission and vision statements, facilitated book discussion groups, and DEI working groups across issues of recruitment, retention, and advancement. We spoke in multiple virtual forums and brokered new community networks. There was material investment from unit leadership in budget lines for DEI work and the incorporation of an equity framework in the distribution of resources. We

⁶ Ahmaud Arbery was jogging in a neighborhood near Brunswick, Georgia when white men motivated by anti-Black racism attacked and murdered him. After months of local protests, the perpetrators finally were charged and were convicted in a federal hate crime trial. Breonna Taylor was home in her apartment in Louisville, Kentucky when

police killed her in reckless raid of her apartment. While two officers were fired from their positions, no officers have been charged with the killing of Breonna Taylor. In Minneapolis, Minnesota a white police officer suffocated to death George Floyd while Floyd begged for almost 9 minutes for help to be able to breathe. The officer was convicted of murder.

experienced momentum from the support and believed we could codify new more equitable policies and practices. During the summer of 2020, we worked toward change as fast as possible while attention from the protests made it possible.

While we did work with urgency, we did not anticipate the backlash that arrived as fall semester began. Nor did we anticipate the about face away from “diversity, equity, and inclusion” work toward strategies of appeasement from unit and university leadership in their communication with conservative legislators who had begun to propagate anti-truth, anti-CRT, and anti-LGBTQ+ bills in the South Carolina House and Senate.

The Weaponization of CRT from Behind the Presidential Seal

The night the 45th president attacked “The 1619 Project”, CRT, and DEI initiatives in an executive order, some of the co-directors were working on a grant to help build and sustain critical race leadership through arts-based participatory action research. I looked up from my laptop to focus on the news coverage as if my sight would help me discern what I had just heard.

It was late September and we had begun to meet already to plan for the 2021 summer institute. The grant we were drafting addressed the wear of virtual communication, meeting, and teaching among educators working toward diversity and equity initiatives. After six months of isolation in a state that thwarted precautions against the pandemic at every turn, it was grinding. There was ongoing racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004), racial trauma (Diaz, Hall, and Neville, 2019; Menakem, 2017) and burnout (Gorski, 2019). We knew activist engagement is affected eventually by long-term crises (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Many of us missed and longed

for community spaces. Part of the grant turned toward creative engagement with art to break the isolation and help sustain and build community, support, and networking. Collective arts-based work has transformative potential for developing capacities for social justice (Duffy et al., 2019; Kraehe & Brown, 2011). It felt like it was needed more than ever.

The executive order not only had an immediate chilling effect (Fuchs, 2020) but also propelled 45’s-wing in the GOP to generate dozens of anti-DEI, anti-truth, anti-CRT bills, anti-LGBTQ+ bills. By November in South Carolina the house had introduced five such bills and the senate had introduced one. In response to the surveillance, the CRT courses were moved to synchronous online formats for the safety of our students and ourselves.

That winter in 2021, we continued to plan for a summer institute as hearings began at the statehouse. Some leadership team members testified against the bills during the hearings, others submitted testimonies, or wrote letters. The grounds of South Carolina’s statehouse are only hundred yards from USC’s College of Education where its then Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (renamed in 2023 the Office of Democracy, Education, and Inclusivity), the Center for Innovation in Higher Education, and the Department of Educational Studies all committed to co-sponsoring the CRT summer institute. Their financial support along with a donation from a national educational leader and researcher who asked to remain anonymous provided support for twenty-eight fellowships.⁷

Collective Creative Work as Methodology

Working creatively and working with creative representations from ‘data’ has a long tradition in qualitative research (Denzin, 2003; Norum,

others joined us from Colorado, New Hampshire, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

⁷ The financial support and donation enabled 28 teachers and graduate students to attend the institute at no cost. Many were from South Carolina, but

2000; Richardson, 2000). In her work with a/r/tography Leavy (2009) offers poetry as a way “to play with, expose, highlight, and undermine power” (p. 240). Research poems also expose the fictive dichotomy between art and science. Similarly, performance ethnography also offers research engagement as a form of critical cultural politics (Denzin, 2003). Framing culture as dramaturgical, performance ethnographers enact creative and moral texts. They create and invite acts of remembering, retelling, and reenacting (Denzin, 2003; Gabriel & Lester, 2013). As Noblit (2015) reminds us, the act of remembering is an act of power.

Turning toward creative representation, performance was a way to interact with research for Gabriel and Lester (2013) in complex, conflicting, and particular ways. They hoped engagements with such representations might compel readers and audiences to action. The reader and imagined readers’ workshops were ever present in the production of their ethnodramatic work. In performance ethnography the reader is positioned as a participant intertextually and in ethnodrama as an embodied actor who offers another retelling.

While all research is partial regardless of form (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004), arts based approaches emphasize performative provocation, attention to emotion, and an oral tradition to storytelling that conventional ethnographic representation does not (Anders & Lester, 2015; Noblit, 2004). While we do not identify as poets, we have engaged in an explicitly collective creative process. Written responses ranged from prose written in paragraph form to fragments of thought and short phrases. Some of us chose to retrieve images to share. From both what was visible in our shared virtual document and our discussion which we recorded, we built collective composite art. The representations that follow on the next page may or may not be called poetic.

While there is structure, our emphasis was on sharing space, engaging with one another and our dialogue. I detail some of our process not for

replication but rather to echo some of the dimensionality. Ulmer’s (2017a/b) work about slow ontology and her attention to the power of art informed our process as well. Our reunion slowed us down and offered temporary shelter amidst the distraction and fear that the weaponization of CRT bred. As Toni Morrison (1975) cautioned, “The very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being...None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing” (para. 40). Acts of collective creativity emphasize the interconnectedness of relation and the generative potential of both the art and the collective’s relations. The creative turn signals investment in possibility (Duffy et al., 2019). Creative work holds the potential for new ways of being and thinking that well-worn forms of refutation against racism and oppression often do not. Intergenerational and experiential knowings and storying surfaced, and we engaged with ideas and language of reclamation and repair. We acknowledged one another, our children, and families--all those who are alongside us in the institutional spaces where we work yet not always visible. The moments shared here reflect some of what we shared with each other.

In the institute workshop we built composite poetry with prompts Dr. Duffy provided. What was similar at here was beginning with prompts that invited engagement with critical moments, their chronologies and effects/affects (Delgado & Stefancic, 2021). We started with a simple orientation. “The first writing is a starting place that only you will see. (Open another doc to write in first). Let your voice, memory, words, pace, and feelings take you where you need to go.” Each person then decided what they wanted to copy into our shared virtual document. We reminded each other to move to free write when the prompts felt too restrictive. Our starting places began with:

When I first heard about 45's attacks on diversity trainings, CRT, and the 1619 project through the executive order he issued in September 2020, I...

Now, when I remember, I...

Anticipating the 2021 summer institute, I...

Now, when I remember I...

When I first heard that Republican legislators demanded access to the summer institute and threatened to start a "Defund USC" campaign if we did not re-open registration, I...

Now, when I remember, I...

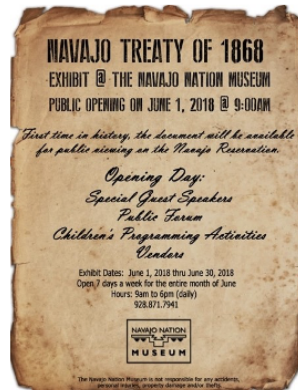
As the backlash intensified across the summer 2021 and into the fall, and Republicans placed colleagues' names on lists and in legislative letters, and initiated a series of anti-truth, anti-CRT, anti-LGBTQ+ bills, I...

Now, when I remember, I...

Prompts also included experiences with family and friends. We spent time writing and

Crystal Clear

Strategic, deliberate
they planned to take CRT
appropriate CRT
Rufo's hubris
crystal clear intentions
from right-wing think tanks
45 attacks
from behind the Presidential Seal
hate speech
hate action



there is nowhere to hide
for Black academics
and others
who have made this their life's work

45 thrives on othering
hatred of communities that don't reflect him,
hate mongering.

legislators emboldened,
a voting base spurred

Could people of goodwill see through this?
Will they?

I wondered

How can we fight back?

**Ginned up propaganda,
Scolded university presidents**

Faculty were put out there
asked to step out, speak out
no university support
no defense
no safety
Ginned up propaganda

SC legislature
Congressional representatives
scolded university presidents
Clemson, USC
Silenced
civil discourse?
academic freedom? free speech?

'Why isn't the university defending CRT?'
students asked.

A "public" University,
Public only in who it serves
a PWI in the South
owned by the Board of Trustees,
by the legislature
holding the purse strings

Well placed phone calls
threatening campaigns
"Defund USC"
Deploy FOX news

University policy:
fear of pissing off the legislature

There's no standing with us, by us, or for us
from the university
no fight for academic freedom.

Faculty are FOIA-ed
Targeted, vulnerable
Commitments to equality,
Denigrated
Work toward equity,
Weaponized

Bell rings true.

The university sustains itself
the system is designed to do so
CRT teaches
our labor is replaceable,
disposable.
CRT teaches
Bell rings true.

discussing our lives outside the CRTSI, our families, our homes, and our communities. Lastly, we addressed in our writing and conversation what "stayed" with us over time.

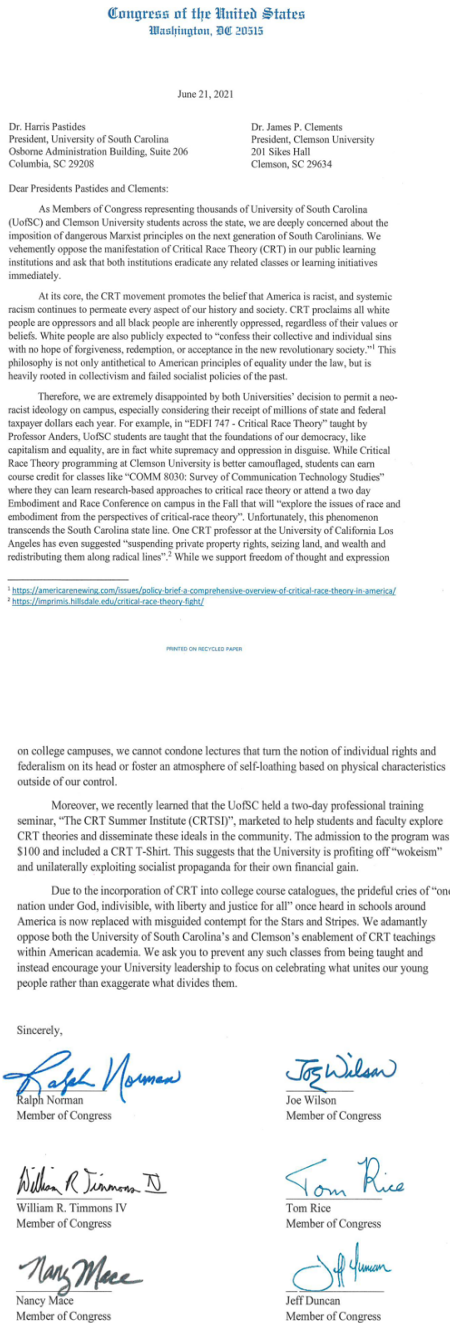
While we specifically worked to surface common elements and groupings, contrasting elements and discord, and contradictions, tensions, and ironies, we shared an iterative process. The pithiness and punch of language itself grounded us as we worked together through early composites in real time. Some of us wanted and needed more time to think and write and shared additional reflections in the days after we met. Drafts of what follows were shared with everyone as we invited further engagement wherever anyone felt moved to engage.

We also invite you as the reader to engage with what is represented, to note things we addressed and things we did not, and to ask questions about what remains unsurfaced. The representations here are but one set of representations among many possibilities.

Together, On an Island

The surveillance and scrutiny did not end with the institute. In the weeks that followed Republicans in Congress continued to attack CRT erroneously describing its aims and identifying by name the faculty among us who teach it.³ (See Figure 1: South Carolina Congressional Delegation CRT). After disseminating the information in legislative mail and on the platform formerly known as Twitter, media requests poured in.

Figure 1- SC Congressional Delegation



CC: Charlie Dorn Smith, III, Chairman of the University of South Carolina Board of Trustees
E. Smyth McKissick, III, Chairman of the Clemson University Board of Trustees

While we had been encouraged by unit leadership to see Republicans attending the institute as an "opportunity" to share with them what CRT is, as the attacks continued, unit and university leadership asked us to avoid all contact with the media. The university was working on a public statement they said. The presidents of the University of South Carolina and Clemson University would release a joint statement they said. And so, we waited for a statement that never came.

As co-directors we felt unsafe and unsupported.

If They Start Rounding Us Up

Be German,
I tell my wife.
Use that passport
If they start rounding us up
Take the kid
with her German passport
Bounce.
Make it out
I'll find y'all
Trust me
If I make it out
I will
I will

At our reunion four of us shared:

- I felt threatened. I was afraid media would show up at my house or worse, some MAGA folks...I was afraid I would not be able to protect my child.
- I thought about going to buy a gun. But didn't know if I would be safe if I went to a gun show.
- My fear is that the hate speech will continue to spur hate action, and then, what comes next?
- I lost complete and utter faith in the University to fight for our academic freedom. The University is "public" only in who it serves. It is owned, and thus is a private entity, by the Board of Trustees and by the conservative legislature. So

long as they hold the purse strings, fear of pissing them off is the only policy that matters.

●

The Use of CRT Felt Really Personal

I felt afraid
scared
angry
straight up angry

I'm still angry
I felt fear
sad fear
frustrated

I felt
threatened,
threatened personally,
our personhood
under attack.

Afraid
I did not want fear
to drive my decisions
the physical aspect is not insignificant.

So much disdain vitriol hatred
45's custom-made divisiveness, discrimination, and hate
state sanctioned violence
against freedom of speech
someone was paid to do that research

More politicians more individuals
using hate
speech without any consequence

The use of CRT
felt really personal.
I feel threatened.

I fear not being able to protect my child.

And then in late summer our emails were searched using FOIA (Freedom of Information Act). Along with some upper administrators, the request sought all emails with keywords “Critical

Work Old School

Hard copies, phone calls,
hallway meetings, texts can be
FOIA-ed, work old school.

Race Theory”, “Critical Race Theory Summer Institute”, the course name and prefix, our names as faculty, and the names of the Republicans in Congress who had attacked CRT after the institute. FOIA for emails include all accompanying attachments. The Freedom of Information Act Coordinator for the Columbia campus at USC communicated over email with one of the co-directors / co-facilitators. The coordinator wrote: “There is nothing to be concerned about, but I just wanted to give you a heads up.”

As months passed the investments in and commitments to DEI from leadership in the College receded. We were informed in August and again in December 2021 that there would be no public statements. The attacks on courses were not addressed; neither was academic freedom more broadly. While some faculty colleagues across campus reached out to us in support and a few in outrage, university communications and leadership remained silent. Graduate students sought guidance in weighing their choices to continue to study and incorporate CRT into their work. Was it safe or wise to do so? Those engaged in community work and critical race praxis worked offline and off campus. We did not know if the Republican legislators would ban the courses we offered.

Our Resilience Continues

In March 2022 Kimberlé Crenshaw visited USC, and we had the opportunity to meet with her and a small team from the African American Policy Forum. She shared with us that during the summer of 2020 she had been watching for the backlash. Indeed, in the early 1990s she had cautioned all of us in to prepare for retrenchment (Crenshaw, 1988). Her comments that day reminded us that the backlash is ever present, not a cycle, and we returned to that teaching at our reunion. A co-director / co-facilitator shared, “Even when you thought things were cool and the world was running smoothly...that is when the

conservatives were quietly plotting their takeover of the judicial branches of government. They are always plotting.” Crenshaw offered other reminders, too: The work is intergenerational and coming together and working collectively matters.

There is Foolishness Afoot

I stand firm
Know who I am
My lineage, my history
I think about my parents' struggle
policies that outlaw our existence
I will NOT cower

I challenge this moment head on
find solace in family
my children, my partner
solidarity in friends.

We see each other
appreciate each other
I rebuild
disengage to re-engage
There is foolishness afoot
Work must be done

But **not alone**
Our collective power
Our gathering
Our **purpose**, our **passion** and **pride** -
they hate
they fear.

Our collective work sustains
We will NOT cower

To engage in the long struggle means sustaining ourselves in order to do so. Finding shelter, however temporary it may be, offers some respite. *In the Shelter* by Pádraig Ó'Tuama captures his poetry on power, conflict, and religion. The title comes from the Irish proverb “Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine” [It is in the shelter of one another that people live] (Ó'Tuama, 2021). Some lessons have value in their relearning. The incursion we experienced forced intergenerational knowledge to the surface. The institution does not provide shelter for the laborers who sustain it. Tread carefully in moments you may find it there. In contrast, and this is a lesson we think Mari Matsuda knows well, creativity, and in particular collective creativity offers boundless, infinite

possibility. And collective creative work is needed.

Be Reminded

Though this moment feels
large
It is only one of
many
As long as I am WITH
community
I am cared for and
with and for

We have no choice BUT to
persevere
Knowing our people have
taken hits to the chin
It's not about Us
This is intergenerational work

Be community
Commune
Unite
WITH and FOR
In the fight

“Be Very Vigilant, Very Vigilant”

The esteemed Reverend Dr. Senator I. DeQuincey Newman was interviewed by Grace McFadden in 1985. In his interview he cautioned those of us committed to racial justice and equity to remain “very vigilant”, that some in the majority “resent the progress that black people have made, and if they could turn the clock back, they would.” He warned:

There could be a reversion in the race relations pattern. We haven't progressed yet to the extent that we can take our freedom for granted. We have to be very vigilant, very vigilant. And we've got to be on the defensive. There is an element in the majority race who resent the progress that black people have made, and if they could turn the clock back, they would. Make no mistake about that. We're not out of the woods yet. There is a veneer of goodwill, a veneer of goodwill. It's

in the best economic interest of the state to indicate good race relations...we feel that we're getting along as well as we are not because of the protection of the image of the state, rather than stemming from the heart, or because from the Christian viewpoint it's right. It's right to have brotherhood, regardless of race, creed, or color. I wish that this was what our race relations stem from, but that isn't the case. (Lare, 2016, p. 152).

CRTSI Resilience

Inspire like Derrick
Lead like Kimberlé
Speak Up like Richard
Create like Mari
Storytell like Chuck
Argue like Cheryl
Disrupt like Neil
Challenge like Gerald & Kathryn
Dream like Lani
Educate like Gloria
Inspire like Daniel

Organize
Advocate
Liberate

Distractions and detractors will continue in what is already centuries long work toward racial justice. The incredulity of Reverend Newman, hoping for race relations “stemming from the heart” and yet recognizing “goodwill” as part of the economic maintenance of the state, is echoed in Bell’s (1992) caution against beliefs in empathy and time as responses to systemic racial inequities and domestic and state violence against Black, Brown and Tribal communities and other communities of Color. They are not enough. While none of the work here resolves the tensions that Reverend Newman and Derrick Bell addressed, we do hope they have laid bare some of the strategies and structures of white supremacy that continue to make the journey toward racial equity as difficult and fraught as it is. Inspired by those who have come before us, we also represent as our commitments to gather and advance the work of racial justice and equity together.


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The CRT Conundrum in South Carolina and Across the United States of America

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By early 2024 the number of anti-DEI bills has increased to 65 across 25 states. Eight bills have become law (*The Chronicle*, 2024). The passage of provisions in the 2022 South Carolina budget appropriations bill (H4100), particularly proviso H630, ignited a firestorm in educational spaces. The proviso's sweeping language, which prohibits state funding for any instruction implying one race or sex is inherently superior or responsible for the actions of others in the past, effectively casts a wide net over the potential teaching of topics related to race, systemic injustice, and historical oppression. The language in the proviso reflected a wave of nationwide anti-CRT efforts. The ambiguity around what constituted a violation of the law had a profound chilling effect on educators across the state.

Education in a Context of Uncertainty and Fear

Teachers, particularly those in the humanities and social sciences, hesitated to address controversial topics. Conversations around race, historical discrimination, or even current events faced increased scrutiny and self-censorship due to fear of potential consequences. According to the *Washington Post*, between June 2020 and June 2022, various school districts fired 74 educators, and another 92 resigned across 28 states under

pressure stemming from conservative legislative discourse (Natanson & Balingit, 2022). In November 2022, the first African American male school superintendent in Berkeley County, South Carolina (the 4th largest school district in the state), who had worked in Berkeley County School District for 21 years, was terminated without cause during a school board meeting (Erikson & Jabour, 2022). The conservative group Moms for Liberty⁸ backed the six board members who joined to vote for his termination. According to a Facebook message posted shortly after the Berkeley County School District board meeting ended, Moms for Liberty celebrated, "Berkeley County – 6 new board member clean house on the first night on the job" (Zalaznick, 2022).

Teaching and Learning with Curricular Restrictions

Some school districts preemptively removed texts or materials they deemed potentially problematic. This resulted in a less robust educational experience for students, limiting their exposure to diverse and challenging perspectives. During the same meeting in Berkeley County, South Carolina, where the board banned the teaching of CRT, it established a committee to decide which books and materials

⁸ Founded in 2021 by three former school board members in Florida, Moms for Liberty is a far-right organization and self-identifies as part of the modern parental rights movement that opposes racially

inclusive and LGBTQ+ school curriculum, and has advocated books bans. See <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/moms-liberty>.

should be prohibited from Berkeley County schools (Kingkade, 2022).

Furthermore, one of the Moms for Liberty-backed members moved to terminate Tiffany Richardson, Berkeley County School District's in-house counsel. In her place, they installed Brandon Gaskins, a lawyer who served as chief legal counsel for former South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford (2003-2011). The retrenchment was so prolific that it made national news. Kingkade (2022) references the NBC News article that covered the story; the byline reads: "Each vote – firing the superintendent, picking his replacement, terminating the district's lawyer and banning critical race theory – passed with the support from only the six Moms for Liberty-backed members" (Kingkade, 2022).

Though not dismissed from her position as an English teacher at Chapin High School in Chapin, South Carolina, Mary Wood's experience demonstrates the impact of pedagogically restrictive legislation on teachers, specifically Wood's HB 3728 (2023). Wood, a veteran teacher of 14 years and a Chapin High alumnus received a letter of reprimand following reports made by two students in her Spring 2023 AP English and Composition class. The students claimed that Wood's assignment on Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2015 book, *Between the World and Me*, a first-person narrative examination of Coates' experiences as a Black man in contemporary America, made them uncomfortable.

HB 3728 forbids teachers from engaging in instruction that makes any student "feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress owing to their race" (Natanson, 2023). Empowered by HB 3728, the students forwent conversations with Wood, her department chair, and her principal, filing a complaint directly with the school board. The students' emails indicated that the assignment, in addition to two videos shown by Wood that addressed systemic racism, "made them ashamed to be white" (Natanson, 2023). The school district prohibited Wood from teaching any further lessons engaging in racism following two

additional complaints made by parents. After some additional investigation, the school district placed a formal letter of reprimand in her professional district file.

It should be noted that Wood's lesson adhered to the AP standards set by the College Board, which note that AP English and Composition courses can address "issues that might, from a particular social, historical, or cultural viewpoint, be considered controversial, including references to...races" (Natanson, 2023). Wood had taught the same unit using Coates text and the same accompanying videos the year prior with no issue. However, given the proviso, teaching the same content with the same resources in the spring of 2023 brought consequences that had not previously existed.

Despite receiving no disciplinary action beyond the reprimand, the cost for Wood has been high. The story quickly became headline news locally and was picked up by national outlets as well. Moreover, during the summer of 2023, the complaints made against Wood were a hotly contested topic at several district school board meetings at which a number of people called for Wood's firing. As a result, she spent most of the late spring and summer confined to her house. Moreover, when Wood returned to the classroom in the fall of 2023, she feared ostracization and further professional imposition due to South Carolina's restrictive legislation.

The Looming Specter of Litigation

These restrictions have sent shockwaves through the educational landscape. K-12 teachers and college professors find themselves grappling with sensitive topics for fear of violating the law and facing potential repercussions. University professors are wary of how to approach discussions of race, history, and privilege while ensuring compliance with the legislation. The specter of litigation looms large, creating a chilling effect on open discourse and academic freedom.

Organizations such as the ACLU challenged the law on grounds of violating First Amendment rights. This led to prolonged legal battles, expending taxpayer resources. Despite these immediate impacts, the full consequences of the anti-CRT measures remain unclear. Some fear a dumbing down of the curriculum, where a sanitized version of history takes precedence over the complexities of the past. Others worry it will exacerbate racial and socioeconomic divides by preventing honest discussions about the roots of these disparities.

The fight over CRT in South Carolina reflects a broader national struggle over the teaching of history, race, and identity. Whether these restrictions will withstand legal challenges is yet unknown. What is certain, however, is that the debate over CRT has become deeply polarized, with both sides digging in for a protracted struggle. The future of how South Carolina students understand their society and their place within it hangs in the balance.

The Many Paths Forward: Evolving Interpretation & Educator Pushback

The collective reflections on critical moments from the 2021 CRTSI invites those within and beyond higher education to embrace the tension that “life confronts us with countless challenges and irritations, so that *the challenge often lies in determining which ones are worth confronting and speaking out quickly enough to do some good* (emphasis ours) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, p.25). But as the spirit of the CRTSI commitments remind us, the discernment required is found within a community professing to do some good in solidarity with those most marginalized in education.

The law’s broad terminology leaves much to interpretation by school boards, administrators, state officials, and academia. This could lead to inconsistencies in implementation across different

districts. The law itself might face additional court challenges, further shifting its impact. Many educators remain dedicated to addressing issues of equity and history in their classrooms, even within these restrictions. They are finding creative ways to explore essential themes while staying within the confines of the law. Organizations supporting teachers in navigating these challenges have also emerged. The importance of reflective action and the unique meaning of praxis for many scholars is captured by Wing (2003):

My own explanation for the need for praxis is based upon the historical realities of many minorities. Since many of us come from disenfranchised communities of color, we feel compelled to look to the bottom, to involve ourselves in the development of solutions to our people’s problems. We cannot afford to adopt the classic, detached, ivory tower model of scholarship when so many are suffering, sometimes in our own extended families. We do not believe in praxis instead of theory, but that both are essential to our people’s literal and figurative future.

Educators are on the frontlines of reckoning with our racial past and present. Recognizing the real-world implications for educators under these restrictions is crucial. The debate around CRT in South Carolina mirrors a more significant national struggle over how to teach about race, history, and social justice. The outcomes in South Carolina will influence and be influenced by this broader landscape. The debate over Critical Race Theory and anti-CRT measures in South Carolina and across the United States is far from over. The long-term effects will depend on the interpretation of the law, the resilience of educators, and the shifting ground of the national conversation about teaching truth – teaching histories of oppression and the ways people resisted in the pursuit of a more just multiracial democratic society.

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