The (Racially Neutral) Politics of Education: A Critical Race Theory Perspective

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Although Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the legal arena, its influence has proliferated throughout the social sciences literature. Yet CRT has not spread significantly into the field of educational leadership, where the discourse on diversity has failed to penetrate the salience of racism in schooling. The purpose of this article is to confront the silence on race in schools and to summon scholars in the politics of education to critical analysis of race as an issue in public schools.

Keywords: politics of education; politics of race in education; Critical Race Theory

A few days prior to writing the introduction to this article, I received an “urgent” e-mail from a student enrolled in my School/Community Relations course in 2002. The student, an assistant principal at a local elementary school, is one of the most active and engaged in the class. His e-mail was part of a journaling assignment in which students write their reflections about class discussions. This particular discussion focused on the lingering pervasiveness of racism in society and the need to understand its effects on communities of color. The e-mail is reproduced in full below:

I’m really enjoying this class thus far. I think the discussions are great and are very thought provoking. I have certainly learned a lot in the past few weeks! However, I have a small problem with some of the issues Dr. Lopez raised in yesterday’s class. Although the topic of racism is certainly important, I feel that he tends to “blame” one particular group (i.e., Euro-Americans) as being responsible for racism in society. Such generalizations are as bad, or perhaps worse, than the stereotypes and generalizations made of people of color on an everyday basis! In other words, this type of “finger-pointing” does NOTHING to resolve the issue of racism in society. On the contrary, it only perpetuates the problem by lumping all “white people” into one homogenous group! Isn’t this just another form of stereotyping?

I don’t believe that “white people” are the only instigators of racism in this society. For example, there are black hate groups, such as The National of Islam [sic], that preach hatred toward anyone who is not an African American. This is racism plain and simple. Why should there be a double standard for “white” hate groups and “black” hate groups? Racism is rooted in IGNORANCE, and not in [social] power. If we are to make any type of progress on racial issues, then we need to stop looking for a group to “blame,” and fix people’s ignorance first.

The concerns raised by this student, although certainly valid, are not new or unfamiliar. In fact, this type of logic is quite prevalent in American popular ideology: where racism is perceived as an individual and irrational act in a world that is otherwise neutral, rational, and just (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). This view of racism is rooted in the Civil Rights discourse of the 1950s and 1960s and posits that in an ideal world, people are—and ought to be—“colorblind” (Farley, 2002; Gotanda, 1995). Although this is certainly a laudable goal, it positions racism at the individual level and ignores other ways in which it functions in society.

Racism, in other words, has been reduced to broad generalizations about another group based on the color of their skin. It has become an individual construction as opposed to a social and/or civilizational construct (Scheurich & Young, 1997; Young & Laible, 2000). In this regard, racism is not necessarily connected to the larger “distribution of jobs, power, prestige, and wealth” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiv) but is viewed as deviant behaviors and/or attitudes in an otherwise neutral world. The belief that colorblindness will eliminate racism is not only shortsighted but reinforces the notion that racism is a personal—as opposed to systemic—issue (Matsuda, 1996; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tatum, 1997; Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002; Williams, 1995b).

By ignoring this broader sociological web of power in which racism functions, individuals can readily equate White racism with Black nationalism. This slippage only serves to protect the idea of a neutral social order by moving the focus away from the barriers and inequities that exist in society and refocusing it on the “ignorant” individual(s). As a result, the collective frustrations of people of color and/or Black nationalist groups are simply seen as irrational—their struggle and plight to end racism are, in effect, reduced to a deviant form of “reverse” racism (see also Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, in press). This slippage only maintains racism firmly in place by ignoring or downplaying the role of White racism in the larger social order.

To be certain, racism has never waned in society; it has merely been manifested in different forms. However, the discourse on racism has shifted through time, such that overt and/or blatant acts of hate (e.g., name calling,
lynching, hate crimes, etc.) have only been identified as being racist (Crenshaw, 2002; Hayman & Levit, 2002). This focus on explicit acts has ignored the subtle, hidden, and often insidious forms of racism that operate at a deeper, more systemic level. When racism becomes “invisible,” individuals begin to think that it is merely a thing of the past and/or only connected to the specific act. Rarely is racism seen as something that is always present in society and in our daily lives (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Valdes et al., 2002).

For example, when I was coteaching a summer course for preservice principals, I was “given” the responsibility for teaching a special section on diversity.1 Halfway through my presentation, I was interrupted by a student—a White middle school principal in a rural district—who declared,

> With all due respect Dr. López, I come from a pretty homogenous district. All of my students are basically White. We’ve never had any diversity in my district and we probably never will have any diversity either. When are we moving on to the more important stuff?

Statements such as these not only embody a very limited understanding of race and race relations but also presuppose that racism is not an important topic of study for today’s educational leaders (see also Lomotey, 1995; Parker & Shapiro, 1992; Young & Laible, 2000). Such assertions also naively suggest there is very little to be learned from diversity—and that the “important stuff” in educational leadership is not about creating schools that work for all children but rest in the more technical matters of school finance, organizational theory, leadership theory, and other staple topics.

Unfortunately, these beliefs are informed by the very structure of our leadership preparation programs. Quite simply, preparation programs across the nation do very little to equip students with a cogent understanding of racism and race relations (Laible & Harrington, 1998; Lomotey, 1995; Parker & Shapiro, 1992; Reyes, Velez, & Peña, 1993; Young & Laible, 2000). Moreover, when these topics are introduced, they are often relegated to special topics courses or seminars that are not part of the core curriculum of leadership preparation. This not only relegates race to a theoretical footnote within the larger discourse of educational leadership but also fails to probe how issues of race intersect and permeate the educational landscape.

As scholars who prepare future educational leaders, we have a duty to know and raise questions about race and racism in society, as well as an ethical responsibility to interrogate systems, organizational frameworks, and leadership theories that privilege certain groups and/or perspectives over others (Capper, 1993; Donmoyer, Imber, & Scheurich, 1995). We also have a duty to challenge oppression in all forms and an obligation to interrogate how schools and administrators oftentimes silence students who are culturally different (Larson, 1997; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). We have a duty to transform schools from being sorting mechanisms in the larger global market—where people of color, women, and the disenfranchised are prepared to fit a particular role in society (Avery, 1980; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977)—to being institutions of hope and social change. However, we cannot adequately prepare future leaders to achieve these goals if we avoid exposing them to issues of race, racism, and racial politics and demonstrate to them how these issues still permeate the educational landscape (Parker & Shapiro, 1992).

Clearly, what we teach in administrator preparation programs is insufficient—especially in this rapidly changing demographic and linguistically diverse society. School leaders must be prepared to work with individuals who are culturally different and help create learning environments that foster respect, tolerance, and intercultural understanding. They must also have an awareness of the effect of racism and how it intersects with other areas of difference such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, and class oppression. Unfortunately, as Young and Laible (2000) suggested, “White educators and educational leaders do not have a thorough enough understanding of racism in its many manifestations... nor do they comprehend the ways in which they are perpetuating White racism in their schools” (p. 375). We must take proactive steps to address this problem by revisiting our knowledge base and critically interrogate how race fits in to the larger discourse of what educational leaders are supposed to know and be able to do.

Taken holistically, we need to develop antiracist educators who recognize the reproductive functions of schooling and have the courage to envision different possibilities for schooling—particularly for our most marginalized youth and communities. These leaders will, no doubt, require a new set of tools, mindsets, and dispositions than what is commonly taught in leadership preparation programs (Capper, 1993; Donmoyer et al., 1995). As Young and Laible (2000) attested, “If changes are not made, educational administration programs will continue to produce primarily white, middle class administrators with little understanding of or interest in the institutionalized system of white privilege, oppression, and racism” (p. 388). In short, a critical reevaluation of the knowledge base in educational leadership must be made to address this toxic trend (see also Capper, 1993; Donmoyer et al., 1995; Ortiz & Ortiz, 1995; Sanford, 1995; Scribner, López, Koschoreck, Mahitivanichcha, & Scheurich, 1999).

Given the rapidly changing demographic profile of the United States, the study of the politics of education has never been of greater importance. In
today’s schools, educational leaders must interact with a diverse array of constituents—many of whom are from different cultural backgrounds and speak languages other than English. Today’s administrators must not only be able to successfully navigate these cultural divisions, but must also have a thorough understanding of political systems, intergovernmental relations, micropolitics, community participation, interest groups, and theories of power and conflict to effectively do their job. Indeed, today’s educational leaders must not only be culturally savvy but politically savvy as well.

In the section that follows, I provide readers with a broad overview of educational politics and policy and discuss how these theories are insufficient in preparing educational leaders to work in diverse communities. Specifically, I discuss how one popular political theory ignores critical issues of race, leaving us with a partial understanding of conflict and power as well as a sanitized view of racial politics in the United States. I will then examine how this decontextualized and deracialized narrative fosters an inability to critically confront racism and racist educational policy. I then conclude with a call to unmask the hidden faces of racism in all its forms—using an emerging area of legal scholarship known as Critical Race Theory (CRT)—beginning with a critical examination of our own collective practices and knowledge base.

REVISITING THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION

Since its inception, the study of the educational politics has largely, if not exclusively, centered around the central question of “who gets what, when and how” (Lasswell, 1936) and how those interactions, decisions, and processes highlight the “authoritative allocation of values” (Easton, 1965). Stated somewhat differently, the politics of education has focused on those mechanisms—formal and informal, visible and unseen—by which individuals, or groups of individuals, influence the decision-making process as well as the resulting policy outcomes (Stout, Tallerico, & Scribner, 1994). Such mechanisms of influence include conflict and its resolution (Schattschneider, 1960), power (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; French & Raven, 1999; Lutz, 1977), pressure and influence tactics (Dye & Zeigler, 1970; Sroufe, 1981), agenda setting (Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Sroufe, 1981), voting behavior (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; Wirt & Kirst, 1982), “and any number of related ideas including the age-old ‘dirty politics’” (Scribner & Englert, 1977, p. 21). Educational politics, therefore, emerges from the underlying tensions surrounding competing values and interests, as well as the processes and mechanisms by which those tensions get resolved (Iannaccone, 1967, 1977; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Wirt & Kirst, 1982).

Despite the valuable contributions of this line of inquiry, there is a perception that the focus and scholarship in the field has remained largely unchanged since its inception (Wong, 1995). In fact, by the mid-1970s, Scribner and Englert (1977) had all but identified the core operational concepts that captured the essence of the field as a whole. These four concepts—government, power, conflict, and policy—depicted a wide array of political practices and actions, yet were substantive enough to ensure that the concept was not generically employed. Although various researchers and scholars have focused on a variety of topics and interests within the politics of education, utilizing a wide range of lenses that extend from sociology to economics, these four concepts have served as comprehensive archetypes that structure much of the work we do in the field.

For example, the work on government emphasizes the role of schools as state agencies, and the role of the federal government in influencing educational policy through fiscal, legal, and political means (see also Grodzins, 1966; Mazzoni, 1995; Sroufe, 1995). It also addresses issues of state and local control (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970) and how state education agencies, local districts, and school buildings navigate the federal terrain while being accountable to local constituencies (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1978; Wirt & Kirst, 1982; Zeigler, Jennings, & Peak, 1974). Other work in this area highlights the role of political culture and the relationship between a group’s political orientation and their patterns of government and civic participation (Almond & Verba, 1965; Elazar, 1972). As a whole, this area highlights the role of inter-and intragovernmental relationships, and how those relationships influence and affect public values, political action, and educational policy (Dye, 1998).

The second area—the study of power (see also Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Dunlap & Goldman, 1991; French & Raven, 1999; Gaventa, 1980; Lukes, 1974; Pfeffer, 1981)—surrounds issues of control, decision making, and influence, as well as how power shapes social relationships, policy identification, and policy outcomes. As a theoretical concept, power has moved beyond positional understandings of authority, or “power over” (Morgan, 1997; Yukl, 2000), and has extended into other areas such as special interest groups (Berry, 1984; Davies & Zerchykov, 1981; Dye & Zeigler, 1970; Truman, 1951), political lobbying (Sroufe, 1981, 1995), and a wide variety of political actions that highlight the role of power in society. Although newer work in this area attempts to reframe power by identifying its hidden manifestations (Anderson, 1990; Brunner, 2000; Dunlap & Goldman, 1991; Marshall & Anderson, 1994), the vast majority of the work in this area focuses on power as a vehicle by which things get done in the organization (Pfeffer, 1981), as well as who benefits from those decisions (Marshall, 1997a, 1997b).
The third arena—the study of conflict—also continues to play a central role in the field. Conflict is important because it highlights the various tensions involved when values, mores, and beliefs of different constituencies are at odds (Morgan, 1997; Schattschneider, 1960; Stout et al., 1994), when there is an imbalance between constituent needs and policy outputs (Wirt & Kirst, 1982), or when there is competition over limited resources and/or their allocation (Lutz, 1977). In these situations, conflict is resolved when one party asserts some type of power or influence over the situation. The influence may take the form of conflict socialization (Schattschneider, 1960), collective bargaining (Young, 1991), voting behavior (Wirt & Kirst, 1982), or political pressure (Sroufe, 1981; Truman, 1951) to influence decision making in a particular direction. In this regard, the study of conflict is closely related to the study of power. In essence, power is the primary vehicle through which conflict gets resolved (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

The fourth arena—the study of educational policy—includes formal/juridical mandates, such as federal laws and state regulations, as well as informal practices and customs, such as unspoken or hidden organizational rules and operations (Cibulka, 1994; Marshall & Anderson, 1994). Policy not only determines what gets done but how decisions get done and by whom. In this regard, policy is an action or an output that results from the political process. However, policy can also be an inaction, a decision not made, or what Dye (cited in Cibulka, 1994, p. 106) called “what governments choose not to do.” In other words, policy focuses on the visible as well as invisible mechanisms that structure organizational life. To influence policy, one must be in a position to make political decisions (Dye & Zeigler, 1970; Sroufe, 1981), have access to key decision makers or their staff (Sroufe, 1995), or pose a threat as a politically active and viable constituency (Sroufe, 1981).

**Interrogating Racism Within the Politics of Education**

Unfortunately, the vast majority of tactics and mechanisms privileged in the field emerge from a strong belief in the democratic process—providing a somewhat optimistic take on the efficacy of political and civic participation. Such strategies not only ignore the political fact that power and influence largely remain the dominion of White, middle-class men (Marshall, 1997a), but they also disregard the fact that the vast majority of underrepresented groups do not largely participate in these kinds of political activity (Arax, 1986; Bush, 1984; Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Gaventa, 1980; Preston, Henderson, & Puryear, 1987). In other words, although these theories support and strengthen our collective beliefs in democracy, political action, representational politics, influence, accountability, and the importance of a whole host of input factors in the decision-making process, they nevertheless fail to address why certain individuals fail to participate in the political process altogether and/or how and why the “democratic” process itself marginalizes and silences diverse peoples, their actions, and their perspectives (Marshall, 1993a; Marshall et al., 1989).

Willis Hawley (1977) recognized the limitations of the field almost three decades ago when he stated:

> Whether one accepts Lasswell’s definition [of “who gets what when and how”] or other such widely held and related conceptions that politics involves the authoritative allocation of resources and values, my point is the same—political scientists have been more interested in studying the political *processes* than they have been in studying who receives what benefits from the political process. (p. 319)

As Hawley suggested, scholars in the field are more concerned with “input” and “process” factors, and not necessarily with the outcomes and effects of the political process. The focus on one aspect, to the detriment of the other, certainly has been a shortcoming in the field.

This is a critically important point, because the outcome of policy can be tangible and identifiable (such as the effects of a public policy on a particular group) or intangible and anomalous (such as people’s perceptions of the political system). As Schram (1995) contended, the field disproportionately suffers from an “overly instrumental view of rationality that masks its latent biases” (p. 375). Certainly, the relentless belief in the effectiveness of political and civic participation is itself a type of bias that is often taken for granted by most scholars in the field.

Within the politics of education, we assume that all (legal) citizens of this society have certain inalienable rights—including the right to vote to ensure that government and policies work in their best interest. The field also assumes that all individuals act in politically rational ways and, when necessary, will assert their rights as citizens—through influence, power, conflict, political pressure, voting, or some other mechanism—to minimize real and opportunity costs.

Unfortunately, for the vast majority of people of color, the working poor, women, gays/lesbians/bisexuals, and other marginalized groups—who are constantly reminded on a daily basis that they are second-class citizens in this country—the concept of rights is elusive. Their treatment, in historical and contemporary times, attests to the fact that they have never been afforded their full rights as citizens of this country (Delgado, 1997; Flores & Benmayor, 1997; Guinier, 1991; Preston et al., 1987; Spann, 1995; Williams,
1995b). For people of color, their subordination has not only been socially sanctioned but legally sanctioned as well:

As the "Other," racial minorities have often been neither thought of nor treated as Americans. Historically they have by a number of legal and informal means been excluded from buying property in certain areas, prohibited from voting, and restricted as to whom they could marry. In practice, full American citizenship has been restricted to Whites. Over many years of struggle, rights have been extended and the concept of who belongs to America has expanded. Even so, racial and gender discrimination continue to create real differences in opportunities and in people's perception of their treatment. (Rosaldo & Flores, 1997, p. 58)

If having rights is part of being an American citizen (Flores, 1997), then clearly, racial minorities in the United States are far from full incorporation in this regard. They may be equal members of society under the law—but socially, politically, and economically, they are rendered one down by a racist political and legal system that marginalizes them on an everyday basis. As Slater and Boyd (1999) suggested, individuals can be members of the larger polity but may not necessarily be afforded equal status in the larger polity.

Therefore, to suggest that all individuals have equal rights under the law and have equal ability and potential to exercise those rights via political action and/or influence—in other words, to suggest that all individuals, irrespective of race or power, act in politically rational ways—is not only shortsighted but disingenuous. It suggests the public space is racially neutral and that contextual factors do not matter in the larger social and political arena.

As a whole, issues of racial avoidance are not at all uncommon. For example, in educational administration, very few individuals have had a critical dialogue about the role of racism in society—and more specifically, racism in our beliefs, ideas, practices, and knowledge bases (Donmoyer et al., 1995; Scribner et al., 1999). Within the politics of education, discussions of racism have also been largely avoided. Although we often have important conversations surrounding the core concepts of "power, conflict, government, and policy," rarely have we had a provocative discussion of race and racism and how they affect the field (for some exceptions, see Anderson & Herr, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Marshall, 1993a, 1993b, 1997a; Marshall & Anderson, 1994; Marshall et al., 1989; Risvi, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997).

This is not to suggest that the politics of education arena is impervious to issues that directly affect people of color. Rather, it merely suggests that the field as a whole has not moved away from its traditional roots in political science, its heavy reliance on theories of participatory democracy, and its emphasis surrounding the incontestable benefits of commonly accepted civic practices such as voting, political action, social movements, and other influence strategies. In this regard, the politics of education takes for granted a key assumption surrounding the efficacy of American "democracy" while simultaneously viewing the public space as racially neutral.

The next section provides an example of one popular political theory in education—Schattschneider's theory of the socialization of conflict—and how this concept largely ignores issues of race and racism. By taking a more historical approach, I will attempt to reveal how Schattschneider's examples lead to a decontextualized and deracialized political theory of conflict, yielding a sanitized view of racial politics in the United States. I argue that these theories produce a racially neutral understanding of educational politics and policy while fostering an inability to critically understand the role of race and racism in the larger social order.

"COLORBLIND" POLITICAL THEORY: AN EXAMPLE

In 1960, E. E. Schattschneider published an interesting book entitled The Semisovereign People, which aimed to provide a more realistic account of democracy in America. His basic tenet, outlined in the introductory chapter, was that the policy arena is not necessarily influenced by the conflicting interests of policy actors per se, but by the "contagiousness of conflict" (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 2), or the extent and scope of external audience participation. By highlighting the notion that "every conflict consists of two parts: (1) the few individuals who are actively engaged at the center and (2) the audience that is irresistibly attracted to the scene" (p. 2), Schattschneider suggested that the socialization of conflict was the lifeblood of policy and politics. He believed that every conflict had the potential of creating a "chain reaction" (p. 2) and that the outcome of the conflict was, itself, determined by this reaction. This not only led him to conclude that the audience "plays a decisive role in the outcome of a fight" (p. 2), but that the management and control of conflict was essentially the heart of the political process.

What struck me most about this book and its introductory chapter was not the theoretical proposition surrounding the socialization of conflict—which makes sense from the view of traditional participatory democracy—but the example he used to support his premise. In his example, Schattschneider made reference to a 1943 fight between a Black soldier and a White police officer in New York City which resulted in public riot and mass demonstration by African Americans.
In his retelling of this event, Schattschneider (1960) provided a rather
descriptive account that was almost storylike in nature:

On a hot afternoon in August, 1943, in the Harlem section of New York City a
Negro soldier and a White policeman got into a fight in the lobby of a hotel.
News of the fight spread rapidly throughout the area. In a few minutes angry
crowds gathered in front of the hotel, at the police station and at the hospital to
which the injured policeman was taken. Before order could be restored about
four hundred people were injured and millions of dollars’ worth of property
was destroyed. (p. 1)

The riot being described—the second to occur in New York City within an 8-
year period—was certainly not a unique or isolated event. In fact, in 1943,
similar disturbances occurred in Los Angeles and Detroit, riots that also re-
sulted in death, arrests, and millions of dollars in property damage.

Although Schattschneider (1960) suggested that the Harlem event was
“not a race riot” (p. 1)—a sentiment that echoed the beliefs of former New
York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia and former African American New
York City congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (Capeci, 1977)—the fact of
the matter was that the two individuals at the center of the conflict were of dif-
f erent races. Moreover, evidence overwhelmingly finds that the Harlem riot
was, indeed, a direct result of racial discrimination, general frustration with
police brutality, and the lack of equal opportunity for Blacks in the postwar
era (Capeci, 1977). In this regard, the story of conflict as told by
Schattschneider is devoid of the overall context and historical circumstances
that led up to the event in question.

Although most accounts of the 1943 Harlem riots suggest the fight was,
indeed, the spark that started the uproar (Feagan & Hahn, 1973; Garrett,
1961), very few accounts provide a more holistic and contextual view of this
event (e.g., see Capeci, 1977; Orlans, 1943). For example, the historical
analysis of Capeci (1977) suggests that African Americans in New York City
lived under severe conditions that were exacerbated by World War I and the
Great Depression. His research finds that African Americans in Harlem—as
well as in most other parts of the United States—had higher unemployment
rates, were the first to be fired from their jobs when the economy suffered,
and were the last to be offered temporary employment from the Federal
Emergency Relief Bureau during the Depression years.

In addition, Capeci’s (1977) research suggests that White worker’s unions
also limited or denied membership to African Americans, or “refused to issue
union cards until Blacks found jobs, knowing they could not get work without
the cards” (p. 36). This type of blatant discrimination in employment prac-
tices was particularly acute in New York City because it disproportionately
suffered from gross underemployment during the war years compared to the
rest of the nation. For African Americans living in Harlem, the effect was
intensified by a general increase in the cost of living, dilapidated and rat-
in fested housing stock, severe overcrowding, malnutrition, inferior health
facilities, and lack of access to quality schools (Capeci, 1977). The blatant
enforcement of Jim Crow laws only made matters worse because it justified
overt discrimination and institutionalized racist practices.

Despite the fact that the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor ushered in a renewed
sense of national unity, most African Americans fully recognized the irony of
supporting a war in the name of democracy, given the virtual absence of
“democracy” for them in the United States (Capeci, 1977; Hughes, 1986;
Powell, 1971). The paradox of fighting a racist Hitler abroad while allowing
and encouraging racism at home seemed overly hypocritical to most people
of color. Without a doubt, the war only served to heighten existing
racial divisions, as White and non-White workers increasingly competed
for scarce resources (jobs, housing, government relief, etc.) and as racism
and oppression festered into resentment and frustration in Black and Latino
communities.

Needless to say, the social milieu and overall racial climate was particu-
larly tense during this period in history. The slightest incident had the poten-
tial of setting off the collective anger and indignation of marginalized com-
unities—an anger that would be met with equal resistance from White
Americans who viewed African American and Latino zoot suiters as unpatri-
otic (Orlans, 1943).

In this regard, the context and background that led up to the conflict on that
“hot afternoon in August” is just as important as the incident itself. In other
words, there is a story behind the story that is as telling as the narrative and
outcome of what is told by Schattschneider. In this case, the 1943 Harlem riot
is not solely about a scuffle or conflict between two individuals. Rather, it is a
story of inequality, racism, oppression, frustration, and the larger struggle for
social justice. 3

In fact, the story behind the Harlem riot begins not with two men fighting.
Rather, it begins when a young woman, Marjorie Polite, asked to switch
rooms at Harlem’s Braddock Hotel—a hotel that was under constant police
surveillance for suspected prostitution activity (Capeci, 1977; Orlans, 1943).
When Ms. Polite realized the room to which she was switched lacked shower
and bathing facilities, she asked for a refund of her money. Prior to checking
out, however, Polite insisted on the return of a dollar tip she had given
the hotel elevator operator (Capeci, 1977; Guzman, 1947). When the operator
denied receiving the tip, Ms. Polite became angry and contentious. A White
police officer, James Collins, who was assigned to “raided premise duty” in
the property destroyed by the Negro mob belonged to Negroes." (p. 2) For Mayor La Guardia and Congressman Powell, the event was not a race riot because there was no "physical violence" between Blacks and Whites (Capstick, 1943/77). In essence, a race riot, according to these definitions, can only occur if there are objective facts of direct contact or aggression. Violent acts committed by a group can be included in this definition.

By referring to the 1943 incident as an "incidence of racial tension" and not a race riot, individuals and policies were not measured by the event's racial undertones but rather by the social and cultural context in which they occurred. This distinction has led us to believe that the public's perception of the incident was misaligned with its actual consequences. Instead, it becomes a matter of concern for those who study social conflicts, where chaos and destruction are the byproducts of larger systemic issues rather than direct human interaction.

Moreover, because individuals failed to identify racism and reified to the belief that the riot was an isolated incident, there was no need to fundamentally alter the social and political representation of African Americans. In fact, the lack of a broader social and political response for instance, African Americans targeted by the police, not just at symbols of White power such as the New York Police Department or other institutions, was a critical issue. How could Schattschneider's theory of collective action and the idea of a "shared-racial" crisis help us understand the lack of a broader social and political response during the Harlem riot?

As such, the overall event and public reaction did little to substantially alter the social and economic inequities in New York City during this period in history.

The riots of 1943 and 1964 were both characterized by a series of events that led to racial confrontations. However, the riot of 1964 was more widely recognized as a race riot because of the involvement of predominantly African American protesters, many of whom were leaders of the civil rights movement. This riot was known as the Harlem riots of 1964 and was the result of a convergence of factors, including economic hardship, racial discrimination, and police brutality. The riot started as a protest over the beating of a Black youth by the police and quickly escalated into a broader rioting that lasted for several days. The riot was eventually quelled by the National Guard, and the government responded with increased patrols and economic aid to the community.

In contrast, the riot of 1943 was not recognized as a race riot because it involved predominantly White protesters, many of whom were members of the Black gang known as the "Ruffians." The police did not respond with the same severity as in 1964, and the incident was quickly dispelled. The lack of public and political response during the 1943 incident was a result of the prevailing racial attitudes and the belief that the incident was an isolated incident rather than a reflection of broader systemic issues.

The incident of 1943 is an example of a situation where the white majority and its political institutions failed to recognize the collective action that was taking place among African Americans. This failure to acknowledge the shared-racial crisis not only failed to prevent future incidents but also allowed for the perpetuation of systemic injustices.

In conclusion, the lack of a broader social and political response during the Harlem riot of 1943 was a result of the prevailing racial attitudes and the belief that the incident was an isolated incident rather than a reflection of broader systemic issues. The failure to recognize the collective action that was taking place among African Americans allowed for the perpetuation of systemic injustices and failed to prevent future incidents. The incident of 1943 is an example of how the lack of a broader social and political response can lead to the perpetuation of systemic injustices and failure to prevent future incidents.
as the enactment of overt racial acts—for example, name calling, burning crosses, hate crimes, and so forth—while ignoring the deeper, often invisible, and more insidious forms of racism that occur on a daily basis (Parker, 1998; Schurich & Young, 1997; Tyson, 1998).

In addition, when discussions of racism do occur, people overwhelmingly focus on explicit acts, believing that racism is perpetrated by “bad people” who dislike others because of something as arbitrary and innocuous as their skin color. Although this type of blatant racism certainly does occur, such a belief incorrectly assumes that it is only found at this surface level and does not penetrate our institutions, organizations, or ways of thinking (Bell, 1995b; Delgado, 1995a; Omi & Winant, 1986; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999; Schurich & Young, 1997; Tatum, 1997; Williams, 1995a, 1995b). This limited perspective, therefore, only protects White privilege by highlighting racism’s blatant and conspicuous aspects, while ignoring or downplaying its hidden and structural facets (Harris, 1995; Schurich & Young, 1997; Tyson, 1998).

Needless to say, most individuals do not discuss the topic of racism at all (Fine, Powell, Weis, & Mun Wong, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Sleeer, 1996). They ignore it because they believe the topic is too unpleasant (Anzaldúa, 1990), because they feel that racism is a thing of the past (Bell, 1995b), because they do not see themselves as “raced” individuals (Fine et al., 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Haney López, 1995a, 1995b), or because they feel that the race problem is not theirs to solve (Tatum, 1997). Others feel that because they, as individuals, do not hold racist beliefs, then the topic is somewhat external and impertinent in their daily lives (Frankenberg, 1993). In all of these cases, such beliefs—individually and collectively—domesticate and minimize the role of race and racism in the larger social order.

TOWARD A CRITICAL RACE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

The fact of the matter is that racism is alive and well in this country and has never waned despite the passage of federal and state mandates that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race (Bell, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1995d; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1997; Matsuda, 1996; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993). The only difference between racism today and of the past is that modern-day racism is more subtle, invisible, and insidious. Popular beliefs such as color blindness and equal opportunity have only served to drive racism underground, making it increasingly difficult for people of color to name their reality (Parker et al., 1999).

Racism now requires tangible proof of its existence: hate crimes, lynching, hate speech, burning crosses, or other symbolic or physical assault (Matsuda et al., 1993; Williams, 1995b). It requires a perpetrator—an evildoer who discriminates against others on the basis of skin color or racial makeup—or other tangible evidence of conflict, discrimination, or bias. Without this external proof, racism is difficult to affirm, particularly in a court of law (Matsuda et al., 1993).

Unfortunately, racism is as powerful today as it was in the past; it has merely assumed a normality, and thus an invisibility, in our daily lives. In other words, “Time has made past racial practices and assumptions invisible to modern eyes” (Lazos Vargas, in press). We often fail to recognize racism because we do not see it beyond its most blatant manifestations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). By necessitating tangible documentation of its existence, legal and juridical apparatuses have, in effect, dealt with racism’s most obvious forms but have perpetuated its existence at deeper and more invisible levels.

In addition, racism has now been turned on its head, as allegations of reverse racism and calls for equal protection are increasingly used by Whites to prove discrimination or racial harm against them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This is particularly true in affirmative action cases (Hopwood v. Texas, 1996; Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 1978), where Whites have sued their organizations using the same legal statutes designed to protect African Americans and other marginalized groups (Parker, in press; Taylor, 1999). Indeed, racism has taken on a new twist, as Whites reclaim their positionality and power in society by using the courts as their vehicle. The staying power of case law only institutionalizes the current power relationships between Whites and non-Whites while protecting the material and symbolic property interest of White individuals (Harris, 1995).

In response to these growing concerns, a new area of legal scholarship known as CRT has emerged to analyze the pervasiveness of racism in society (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995a; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, 1996; Matsuda et al., 1993; Valdés et al., 2002; Williams, 1995b). As an outgrowth of the Civil Rights movement and the Critical Legal Studies movement, CRT’s premise is to critically interrogate how the law reproduces, reifies, and normalizes racism in society. Rather than subscribe to the belief that racism is an abnormal or unusual concept, critical race theorists begin with the premise that racism is a normal and endemic component of our social fabric (see also Banks, 1993; Collins, 1991; Gordon, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Schurich & Young, 1997; Tatum, 1997; Tyson, 1998). CRT scholars suggest that the reason why society fails to see racism is because it is such a common/everyday experience that it is often taken for
They do not fit socially acceptable notions of truth. By highlighting these subjugated accounts, CRT hopes to demystify the notion of a racially neutral society and tell another story of a highly racialized social order: a story where social institutions and practices serve the interest of White individuals.

Taken holistically, CRT posits that beliefs in neutrality, democracy, objectivity, and equality “are not just unattainable ideals, they are harmful fictions that obscure the normative supremacy of whiteness in American law and society” (Valdes et al., 2002, p. 3). Notwithstanding, White Americans continue to believe in these ideals, because a racial reality is, perhaps, too difficult to digest. For example, if I were to argue that what we study within the politics of education is entirely racist, most scholars in the field—conservative and liberal alike—would be greatly offended, finding such statements preposterous and absurd. Although some would agree there might be certain institutional practices (such as power) that limit the political participation of nonmainstream groups, or perhaps a handful of truly racist individuals whose values and beliefs create policies that negatively affect people of color, most of us would believe that our knowledge base is not largely affected by racism.

To the contrary, most of us would tend to believe that what we study actually highlights the processes by which people of color are marginalized on a daily basis and how they can challenge and change the political spectrum through voting, grassroots organizing, mass mobilization, and the election of minority officials and representatives. In other words, the belief that the politics of education actually supports a racist agenda does not fit our prevailing and espoused beliefs about the nature of the field.

The role of CRT is to highlight the fact that such beliefs only serve to maintain racism in place—relegating racism to overt/blatant and unmistakable acts of hatred, as opposed to highlighting the ways in which our beliefs, practices, knowledge, and apparatuses reproduce a system of racial hierarchy and social inequality. Rarely do we question our own values and knowledge base and how those beliefs emerge from—and help sustain—the notion of a racially neutral and democratic social order that works for all people. In other words, within the field, we have a tendency to think that social problems (such as racism) will be resolved if more people get involved in the political arena and “do something” about it. The belief in democracy and “justice for all” is protected—as is the belief that the vehicles to ascertain social justice are racially neutral. It is a cheery and simplistic take on how racism actually functions in society, as well as a naive understanding how it can be resolved and remedied.
CONCLUSION

In recent years, CRT has played an important role in both legal and educational circles and has expanded well beyond its origins in the legal arena (see also Delgado Bernal, 2002; Duncan, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lewis, 2001; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Parker et al., 1999; Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002; Tate, 1997; Taylor, 1999; Villalpando, in press; Villalpando & Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Despite this proliferation, CRT has yet to make significant inroads into other important areas of study such as educational administration, politics of education, policy studies, and political science. As a result, important discussions surrounding the permanence of racism remain largely absent in these particular fields. This absence is particularly crucial because these areas collectively argue that social and racial progress cannot only be advanced but can be overcome and remedied through collective good will, reform-oriented visions, and strategic policies. CRT introduces the fact that racial progress cannot be made by politics or policy alone—because racism cannot be remedied without substantially recognizing and altering White privilege.

Earlier in this discussion, I made reference to a story of conflict and how Schattschneider failed to think about race, racism, and the historical treatment of people of color in his analysis. I believe Schattschneider’s work is, in many ways, representative of the field as a whole. Many times, we miss opportunities to identify and name racism, largely because we do not see it in the work we do and/or because our respective lenses are not attuned to recognizing it in our daily lives. CRT provides us with a healthy reminder that racism is alive and well in this country and functions at a level that is often invisible to most individuals. It reminds us that the only way we will make advances in dealing with the problem of racism is if we take the time to see and understand how it operates, recognize it within ourselves, highlight it within our field, and take brave steps to do something about it. Indeed, it reminds us that we have a long way to go to address the intractable problem of race in this society.

As scholars who prepare future educational leaders, we cannot continue to marginalize and/or trivialize issues of race and racism within the larger discourse of educational leadership and policy (Larson, 1997; Parker & Shapiro, 1992; Young & Laible, 2000). Issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other areas of difference—including their intersections—must take a central role in our knowledge base and practices, so that the “important stuff” in educational leadership is not solely rooted in technical knowledge of leadership and organizational theory but rests in the nuances of creating schools that truly work for all children, families, and members of the school community. Perhaps the time has come to take the lessons of CRT to heart and begin the process of naming and dismantling racism within our ranks as well as in the work we do.

NOTES

1. This add-on itself is a racist practice. Not only is the academic terrain of faculty of color often limited to special topics involving diversity, but this type of add-on approach only serves to marginalize race as something that is not central to the curriculum in educational leadership.

2. See also the Best of Simple (1990) stories by Langston Hughes, which brilliantly detail the essence, meaning, and character of African American life in postwar Harlem. Through stories and anecdotes—which vacillate from the strikingly painful to the hilariously funny—Hughes delivers a powerful narrative of race relations, police brutality, love, and vice, never forgetting the social context in which life unfolds.

3. It should be noted that the collective anger and frustration of African Americans did not exist outside of hope, optimism, and faith in social change. In fact, McCartney (1992) argued that these beliefs are not mutually exclusive, because social conditions give rise to anger which results in action and mobilization. Unfortunately, many of the actions taken by African Americans have historically been met with resistance by White Americans.

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