

(slide 1) (slide 2)

(slide 3) Counterstory in Education: Critical Race Theory's Pedagogy for
Social Transformation

A student once asked if there is ever a point in which we (minoritized folk) will get to stop justifying the methodological choice of telling our stories? I believe that we've *all* been telling stories *all* along, but some stories are elevated to the status of theory, scholarship, and literature, while, too often, minoritized perspectives are relegated to marginalized or overlooked "Cultural Rhetorics" methods or genres. While I don't know when or if these academic gatekeepers will arrive at a point of admission that all work, especially in the Humanities, is story, I do know that narrative has always been theoretical. (slide 4) My research makes a case for critical race counterstory as a rhetorical research methodology *and* method by reviewing counterstory through its Critical Race Theory methodological origins and influences, while also analyzing and illustrating the methods of Richard Delgado, Derrick A. Bell, and Patricia J. Williams, who I term "counterstory exemplars." Delgado, Bell, and Williams are foundational critical race theorists whose respective counterstory methods of "Narrated Dialogue," "Fantasy/Allegory," and "Autobiographic Reflection" have set a precedent for other scholars. As such, (slide 5) counterstory as methodology is the verb, the process, the Critical Race Theory-informed justification for the work; whereas counterstory as method is the noun, the genre, the research tool.

(Slide 6) On September 22, 2020, the 45th President of these "United" States issued an "Executive order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping." This executive order states:

[M]any people are pushing a different vision of America that is grounded in hierarchies based on collective social and political identities rather than in the inherent

and equal dignity of every person as an individual. This ideology is rooted in the pernicious and false belief that America is an irredeemably racist and sexist country; that some people, simply on account of their race or sex, are oppressors; and that racial and sexual identities are more important than our common status as human beings and Americans...

And, placing particular focus on our institutions of learning:

[the are] instructors and materials teaching that men and members of certain races, as well as our most venerable institutions, are inherently sexist and racist are appearing in workplace diversity trainings across the country.

This executive order and the 45th president's remarks issued before and after the order (even during the first presidential debate) called particular attention to (Slide 7) Critical Race Theory as the ideology responsible for this "different vision" of America, which then begs the question for many Americans: well, what is critical race theory? So, because this talk is focused on antiracist pedagogy, let's first review and learn about the ideologies, histories, and methodologies of this movement federally vilified by 45's administration--and, most recently by the Texas state legislature.

(slide 8) My engagement in the CRT field builds particularly on the powerful work of critical race theorists who define critical race methodology as a challenge to "majoritarian" stories or "master narratives" of white privilege. This methodology rejects notions of "neutral" research or "objective" research and exposes research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color. Importantly, critical race methodology recognizes that experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism that is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices. (slide 9) A critical race methodology

includes a range of methods such as family histories, biographies, autoethnography, *cuentos*, *testimonios*, and counterstory.

(slide 10) Critical Race Theory is characterized by several major tenets that function as epistemological and ontological premises. The following tenets “inform the ways that CRT scholarship is conducted, especially as it relates to its activist orientation”:

Beginning with “Permanence of Race and Racism,” (slide 11) racism is endemic and a central, permanent, and “normal” part of U.S. society, operating concurrently within multiple forms of social oppression. Taylor asserts that “assumptions of White superiority are so ingrained in political, legal, and educational structures that they are almost unrecognizable [. . .] [and that] because it is all-encompassing and omnipresent, it cannot be easily recognized by its beneficiaries.” Derrick Bell describes a racial realism as racism’s permanence in addition to its centrality through his assertion that “racism lies at the center, not the periphery; in the permanent, not in the fleeting; in the real lives of [. . .] [people of color] and white people.”

(slide 12) In the effort to end all forms of oppression, CRT “Challenges Dominant Ideologies” and liberal claims of race neutrality, equal opportunity, objectivity, colorblindness, and merit. Concerning education and institutional injustice, CRT’s second tenet questions arguments against policies like affirmative action and interrogates admissions and hiring practices that claim neutrality in their selection of candidates, while justifying a passing over of people of color on the “colorblind” basis of merit and “fit.” As Solórzano and Delgado Bernal argue, racialized ideological “paradigms [...] act as camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society.” This self-interest informs CRT’s third tenet, “Interest Convergence,” (slide 13) most notably discussed by Derrick Bell within the context of racial progress discourses.

Bell's theory of interest convergence argues that "white elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for [people of color] only when such advances also promote white self-interest," and this form of "racial progress" (and regression) is cyclical, rather than inevitable. The most commonly referenced example of this theory resides in the 1954 *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision, which is generally taught and remembered as a moral victory for African Americans, but as Bell has pointed out, foreign policy concerns were likely the driving force behind this decision. As Taylor recalls, this case came to light during the Cold War era when televised images of U.S. racial brutality were more readily available to the world. Communist powers such as the former Soviet Union and China sparked international sensations by bringing forth stories and images of police brutality unleashed during peaceful protest and Ku Klux Klan lynchings. These stories and images effectively worked toward undermining the U.S. as a model of democracy just as the country strove to position itself as a leading force of anticommunism. The *Brown* decision then came to represent not a blow to American racism but to communism and was heralded by the Justice Department and the Truman administration as such.

(slide 14) CRT's fourth tenet, "Race as Social Construct," overlaps with and is informed by another racial theory—most prominently, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation. Although biologists, geneticists, anthropologists, and sociologists agree that race is not a biological determinant, humans nonetheless have and continue to taxonomize human bodies racially. As social constructs, these categories are the outcome of an unstable and "decentered" complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle." Further, social constructs of race assert a permanence of race and describe the dimensions of race as maintained by racial projects that function to secure race as fundamental in the structuring and representing of the social world.

(slide 15) Sojourner Truth is one of the earliest U.S. rhetors to describe the first part of CRT's fifth tenet, "Intersectionality"—a lived reality theorized as an analytic framework by CRT scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw. In her notable speech, "Ain't I a Woman?," Truth narrates one of the earliest U.S. expressions of an intersectional consciousness, calling attention to and turning on its head our society's tendency to organize along binaries. Beyond the black/white and woman/man binaries, Truth's lived reality demonstrates the intersecting aspects of her identities and "how their combinations play out in various settings." In 1989, Crenshaw theorized and named intersectionality in her landmark essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex." Crenshaw's examination counters the single axis framework of binaristic racial or gendered analysis, and demonstrates how this analytic structure does not accurately account for the intersections of race and gender, thus contributing to the marginalization and exclusion of Black women in feminist theory and in anti-racist politics.

Twin-skin to "Intersectionality" is, "Anti-essentialism," the second half of CRT's fifth tenet. CRT denounces essentialism, countering culturally racist assumptions that attempt to describe or explain socially constructed racial groups as homogenous in the way they think, act, and believe. For reasons of navigation, survival, activism and social justice (none of which are mutually exclusive), there can be a sense of solidarity among cultures or racial groups, however individuals within groups maintain rights to heterogeneity of perspective, experience, lifestyle, and identity. As such, CRT scholars caution against essentializing cultures and racial groups and believe an anti-essentialist method involves centering experiential knowledge so as to better elucidate lived reality *from* (intersectional) rather than *about* (essentialist) people of color.

(slide 16) Ladson-Billings has traced the history of Interdisciplinarity, as a sixth tenet, in

legal scholarship, confirming “the use of other disciplinary traditions was considered heretical,” and departures from canon, such as Delgado, Bell, and Williams’s rule-breaking legal storytelling, were rejected. Specific to Education, the field where CRT most prominently progressed before branching out to other fields and disciplines, Ladson-Billings recalls a similar battle, stating “for much of its history, education research and scholarship was moored to psychology. Thus ‘real’ research was [...] only scholarship that was ‘neutral’ and ‘objective.’” In all, the premise of interdisciplinarity insists on carving pathways for scholars from disciplines steeped in unyielding commitments to canon. In the spirit of the 1960s activism that resulted in the establishment of Ethnic Studies, CRT pulls on a variety of scholarly traditions toward centralizing and making sense of experiential knowledge.

(slide 17) A commitment to the “Centrality of Experiential Knowledge” comprises CRT’s seventh tenet. CRT scholars recognize and have developed the methodology of counterstory to relate the racial realities of people of color while also providing methods for minoritized people to challenge “the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race.” Further, as Bell has observed, the narrative voice, the teller, “is important to critical race theory in a way not understandable by those whose voices are tacitly deemed legitimate and authoritarian. The voice exposes, tells and retells, signals resistance and caring, and reiterates what kind of power is feared most—the power of commitment to change”.

(slide 18) CRT’s eighth tenet, a “Commitment to Social Justice,” is arguably the most distinguishing characteristic for CRT’s narrative method. While there are many stories and while many data are narrativized, counterstory is distinguished from other forms of storytelling due to its transparent commitment to a “liberatory and transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression.” CRT, then, and its methodology, counterstory, use a narrative method to

theorize racialized experience. And as a necessary function of counterstory, these narratives serve the purpose of exposing stereotypes, expressing injustice, and offer additional truths through a narration of the researchers' lived experiences.

Through my years of work as a CRT researcher/writer of counterstory, I've learned first-hand of counterstory's potential for achieving social justice. A question I often encounter when speaking with audiences about counterstory is, are *all* marginalized narratives counterstory? While there are indeed many marginal/ized narratives, the measure remains whether the tellers and stories subscribe to CRT's tenets, particularly in their critique of a dominant ideology and their sustained focus on social justice as an objective. In other words, what are folk using counterstory to *do*? Expression of minoritized subjectivity is a good starting point, but it is equally important to include the admission of and critical self-reflection on privilege. My privilege is that I am a very educated person with the platform of this project. The question then is what will I do with this platform and privilege? What kind of project will I craft? What is my contribution and, further, as an audience member once asked, "What is the political weight of [this] work?" I believe the answer lies in what I maintain as one additional tenet for CRT—accessibility (slide 19). Derrick Bell's exemplary counterstories are bestsellers. Patricia Williams' work has been reviewed by mainstream presses as she continues to write a column for the popular press *The Nation*, and Richard Delgado's work, published in law reviews, yes, has also been reworked as an introductory text for high school students. Their work continues to inspire and resonate across generations and disciplines. My writing process has included and always will include my family, non-academics, because the work is for them, is sometimes about them, and is nearly always inspired by them. And if my work in counterstory is inaccessible to the very people it is for—well, then what's the point? Why do the work if it's inaccessible? Thus,

in my contribution to defining CRT, I advocate for the premise of accessibility, in the sense that a methodological consideration for counterstory should always envision a multiplicity of audiences beyond the ivory tower, so as “to speak with (rather than for and over) others’ communities.”

(slide 20) So, now that we’ve reviewed the ideologies and, in particular, the tenets of CRT, I’ll shift the focus of this presentation to a discussion more explicitly concerned with counterstory in education and how these tenets serve as foundation to critical race theory’s pedagogy for social transformation.

(Slide 21) The concluding chapter within my book (a chapter I have provided for you all in the linked materials), *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* serves as a call to action for educators, particularly those in rhetoric and writing studies, to consider CRT’s implications and application in their own educational research and teaching practices. CRT has always been concerned with the colonizing functions of education that act as a conveyor for hegemonic whiteness—and CRT teacher-scholars have always aimed to disrupt this hegemony with transformative educational heuristics and praxis. Beyond crafting curricula with CRT and counterstories as primary texts (Appendices A & B in the provided chapter), the theory and methodology of CRT and counterstory can inform a transformational education that can be employed as a frame to revise, re-vision, and craft curricula in a plethora of disciplines (Appendices C & D in the provided chapter).

Critical Race Theory arose out of the lived experiences of *students* and *teachers* in U.S. law schools who were witness and subject to liberal civil rights ideology that failed to address the “constrictive role that racial ideology plays in the composition and culture of American institutions.” CRT scholar, Angela P. Harris (slide 22), has reflected on her own miseducation as a law student, maintaining that students of color during her generation navigated their legal

educations, never finding a place where discourses concerning lived realities and racial critiques entered the legal canon. In fact, as Harris recalls “none of my professors talked about race or ethnicity; it was apparently irrelevant to the law [;] there was only one Law, a law that in its universal majesty applied to everyone without regard to race, color, gender, or creed.”

(slide 23) Derrick Bell took active notice of these erasures and absences in the curriculum, and thus developed and taught legal doctrine from a race-conscious viewpoint and used racial politics as the organizing concept for his students’ scholarly study. Bell crafted counterstories with pedagogical intent, meant to facilitate classroom discussion. Additionally, Bell’s course textbook, *Race, Racism and American Law*—developed, published, and centralized within his own curriculum in the early 1970s—served as a foundation and a curriculum plan for “The Alternative Course,” the student-led course on race and the law at Harvard Law School. This course is remembered as the first institutionalized expression of CRT as a movement, as it challenged the mainstream liberal notion of which subject matters were of enough value to include in a standardized core curriculum. Importantly, this student and teacher activism and the existence of this course are evidence that a primary CRT concern has always been a critique of education and curriculum toward social transformation.

(slide 24) By the mid-1990s CRT was incorporated from legal studies into Education. At the 1994 American Educational Research Association (AERA) meeting, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate’s paper presentation identified the tenets of CRT’s relevance to the study of race and racism in education. (slide 25) Reflecting on her contribution of CRT to Education, Ladson-Billings says, “I argued that CRT could serve as a *heuristic* for new understandings of multicultural education [;] CRT scholars were working to deploy ‘race and racial theory as a challenge to traditional notions of diversity and social hierarchy.’” Informed by and overlapping

with CRT's tenets (but also, from my perspective as a rhetoric scholar, aspects of the rhetorical situation), CRT's heuristic—as theorized by scholars in Education—offers the following guidelines to educators who aim to frame their pedagogy and the crafting of curricula with CRT (slide 26):

- Educators should work from a premise that racism is prevalent in American society in general, and in education in particular (Tenet alignment: permanence of race and racism)
- Educators should question the dominant claims and discourses of their field(s) (Tenet alignment: challenge to dominant ideologies)
- Educators should historically ground their coursework, acknowledging the importance of context (Tenets alignment: permanence of race and racism, interest convergence, race as social construct) (slide 27)
- Educators should aim for interdisciplinarity, drawing from a range of literatures (Tenet alignment: interdisciplinarity)
- Educators should centralize the experiences and perspectives of the minoritized, as a focal point—not a passing glance for a day or week's thematic focus (Tenet alignment: centrality of experiential knowledge)
- As a follow-up to centralizing the experiences and perspectives of the minoritized, educators should acknowledge and make themselves aware that there is diversity within experience (Tenet alignment: intersectionality and anti-essentialism)

Ultimately, the goal of CRT is social transformation, and the heuristic of CRT in Education is aimed at the social transformation of educational research, classrooms, curricula, policy, the study of knowledge (epistemology), and teaching (pedagogy). As Daniella Ann Cook observes, CRT's maintained focus on the centrality of race “elucidates the fluid, shifting, yet

consistent message of white supremacy and how it operates in the policies, practices, and everyday schooling experiences of students, teachers, and the larger community.” Further, counterstory, as a methodological frame that centers the stories and lived experiences of people of color, embodies an “epistemology for how and why particular methods are chosen.” A social transformation of education insists that educational researchers change the structures that prevent all students from receiving the same opportunities to learn and succeed. (slide 28) As Dixon and Rousseau argue, “just as the ‘new’ song of the spirituals was a call for freedom and justice in an unjust world, CRT not only puts in front of us the image of a ‘heaven’ in which *all* God’s children are able to sing their song. It also demands that we find a way to get there”—and for me, that way is methodology—that way is counterstory.

At the core of my academic identity, I am a teacher-scholar who centralizes the theories and methodology of Critical Race Theory within my writing practices but also within my classroom. My body of work as a CRT scholar and educator reviews the histories and theories of CRT, with close readings and analyses of three CRT counterstory exemplars, Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, and Patricia J. Williams. I make a distinct case for counterstory as a viable research methodology and a writing method in public and academic spheres. And while my book’s final chapter is the explicit “pedagogy chapter,” *all* the chapters are arguably pedagogy chapters as well because CRT has always held central its critique of education toward social transformation. Thus, my project as a critical race theorist—while inherently concerned with the rhetoric and writing of CRT—is also intrinsically invested in arguing for CRT’s pedagogical potential in rhetoric and writing studies.

(Slide 29) CRT exemplars Delgado, Bell, and Williams consistently speak (through counterstory and other methods of critical self-reflection) regarding their roles as teachers in

relation to students. Delgado crafted a chronicle's worth of composite dialogues among composite student-teacher characters, Rodrigo and the professor. Bell, a self-proclaimed student to Geneva Crenshaw, crafted counterstories to teach in the classroom as supplementary to the textbook he wrote for his Harvard seminar—a book students took upon themselves to keep teaching in their own seminar after he left. (Slide 30) Likewise, Delgado, along with Stefancic, produced the accessible *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, a book Harris describes as “a primer for nonlawyers that makes the now sprawling literature of critical race theory easily accessible to the beginner” (xvi). Intended for a new generation of critical race scholars, Delgado and Stefancic’s book employs “reader-friendly language,” absent of buzzwords and jargon, covering CRT’s central themes, critiques, and implications.¹ Within this important educational text,² the authors offer teachers and students classroom exercises for practical application and a glossary of key terms, and the conclusion of each chapter provides discussion questions and short lists of suggested readings. Last, Deborah Waire Post has commented that Williams’s narratives are fundamentally reflections on her experiences as a teacher (132).

Because I am a teacher-scholar situated in, yes, rhetoric and writing studies, but also very much influenced by literacy studies, my work as a critical race educator makes space for a synergy of CRT scholarship, histories, and theories that are located primarily in legal studies and education. In light of and as a contribution to this genealogy, the next logical step in CRT’s interdisciplinary journey is making a case for the methodology of counterstory in the framing of rhetoric and writing studies pedagogy and curriculum development. Thus, the provided concluding chapter of my book, reviews the ways CRT and counterstory have informed and influenced my teaching practice and my crafting and teaching of courses within the context of rhetoric and writing studies departments and programs. Specifically discussed within the

provided chapter are pedagogical materials such as syllabi and course plans, ideologically framed by CRT and counterstory. In all, my goal in this work is to extend the conversations about CRT counterstory as research and writing method and toward pedagogy and curriculum development for those who wish to put into practice the rich theories and histories of this methodology. (Slide 31) Some questions to consider at the conclusion of this talk, but also forward-facing are the following: How does CRT and counterstory as frame change the way we build courses? What becomes different? I suggest we begin by looking at core curricula because these constitute the courses in which the already minoritized become marginalized, and nothing is more central to the ideologies and the teachings of disciplines and fields than their core curricula.

The core is where master narratives take root and are reinforced and sanctioned through the institutional racism of rhetoric and writing studies' disciplinary constructs, resulting in classroom-specific racial violence toward students and teachers of color (Kynard, "Teaching while Black" 1). And while I acknowledge and appreciate the work of an elective curricula, I am more than aware of the marginalizing function elective courses serve for already minoritized perspectives. In 2021, minoritized peoples and our perspectives are still not considered core-course material in the (usually white) racist imaginary. And when assessing the master narrative concerning the core curriculum—this hegemonic story, which even POC at times buy into—we are *still* being told, for no less than twelve years in our elementary and secondary school educations, that the core curriculum is by and large the domain of white Euro-Western perspectives and ways of knowing. The core curriculum is the occupied space of white racialized perspectives, while the voices and stories of the racialized "other" are pushed to the margins in elective courses, at best, or footnotes and asides within the core curriculum, at worst. With the

above in mind, it is also no surprise that ethnocentric white students only tolerate the work of POC when it comes in the form of electives—so they can elect not to take these courses. Equally unsurprising is when these same students become angry and resistant upon realizing that *my* approach to these core courses—courses they cannot opt out of because of their major-specific degree requirements—centralizes the rhetorics and theories of POC—albeit still in conversation with white folk.

In all, the direction toward transformative education really is where the work begun in my book travels next. Because I was not able to publish counterstory without first *learning* about it and its methods, because I did not use CRT and counterstory to frame my own curriculum development without first *learning* about its socially transformative roots and implications, I conclude this presentation with a call to action to embrace our identities as students—students forever in the process of becoming—who are still capable of learning and reframing education in rhetoric and writing studies toward the social transformation called into action by critical race theory and counterstory.

(slide 32) In Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies, Carmen Kynard has called for greater attention in the field toward Critical Race Theory in order to better prepare as teacher-scholar-administrators and activists to be institutionally and pedagogically anti-racist. Kynard has astutely observed that “despite everyone’s seeming incessant discussion of critical theories from postcolonialism/decolonization to intersectionality [;] theories can become merely the stage for an academic performance, not a way of engaging the world and oppression in it.” Following Kynard’s example, my work suggests it is crucial to use theory, methodology, and pedagogy that counter those that seek to dismiss or decenter racism and those whose lives are daily affected by it. Counterstory, then, is both method and methodology—it is a method for

telling stories of people whose experiences are not often told, and as informed by CRT, this methodology serves to expose, analyze, and challenge majoritarian stories of racialized privilege. Counterstory can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival, resistance, and justice. (slide 33) Whether presented as primary texts within class, assigned to students as writing and method, or applied as a framework by teachers to transform curriculum, counterstories teach us that “construction of another world—a socially and racially just world—is possible.”

(slide 34) Thank You