Critical Race Theory: Its Origins, History, and Importance to the Discourses and Rhetorics of Race

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ABSTRACT

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in US law schools, bringing together issues of power, race, and racism to address the liberal notion of color blindness, and argues that ignoring racial difference maintains and perpetuates the status quo with its deeply institutionalized injustices to racial minorities. This essay introduces CRT as a theoretical frame by which to better understand discourses of race and racism in contemporary color blind and supposed post-racial societies. This work is situated within rhetorical studies so as to trace connections between CRT scholarship and literatures in anti-racist rhetoric that seek to understand, challenge, and dismantle systems of racism.

An American Context

Saturday, August 9th, Ferguson, Missouri, US—a suburb of St. Louis—an eighteen-year-old teenager was shot, multiple times, until dead, by a local police officer. He was unarmed. He had his hands raised in the universal gesture for surrender. He pleaded with the officer "I don't have a gun, please stop shooting." Yet he was shot. Multiple times. Until dead. His name was Michael Brown. His offense? Jaywalking. His race? Black. The year? 2014.

As swiftly as this young man's life was extinguished, the US media were quick to piece together a story criminalizing this youth through sensationalized headlines and images that drew attention to Brown's black skin and imposing male body (Dickerson; Garcia–Vargas). Words such as "man" versus "teen/child," and an image of an unsmiling casually dressed Brown versus an alternatively available image of the teen in his high school graduation cap and gown, are but few examples of the rhetorical tools wielded by the US media to confirm Brown's guilt by way of the "violent black male" stereotype. As details of the days' events became available from contradictory police department statements and conflicting witness accounts, the American public made equally available its state of divisiveness in perception along the lines of race. Surely prompted by debates raging and ranging from major news shows to the comment sections following blog posts and articles of Brown's death, the Pew Center for Research reported that 80% of African Americans (based on survey data) believe this case raises important issues about race, while 47% of white Americans believe the issue of race is getting more attention than it deserves ("Stark Racial Divisions" 1).

As an American, but significantly, as an American of color who studies contemporary rhetorics of race and racism, I am not surprised by this divide. In fact, the above cited Pew study also confirms exactly how status quo these racialized American perceptions are, through findings that report 60% of white Americans similarly believe race received more attention than was necessary in the 2012–13 Trayvon Martin case, while 78% of black Americans reported the case raised important issues about race ("Stark Racial Divisions" 4).[1] Equally status quo is the all too common and constant violence and death that unarmed

people of color are subjected to at the hands of white police officers. According to Melissa Harris Perry, "From 2006 to 2012 a white police officer killed a black person at least twice a week in [the US]," but the national news media consistently pay little to no attention to these tragedies and as a result the American public is at best unaware of these deaths and at worst, apathetic (Mirkinson). And yet, as Stacey Patton asserts, the post-emancipation devaluing of black bodies is nothing short of an American tradition, but it is a tradition largely overlooked due to white supremacist bias in the media, and significantly, bias in the formation and tellings of US history.[2] Americans are overwhelmingly subjected to hegemonic educations in which the histories of people of color in this country are minimized to footnotes within textbooks, and these passing acknowledgements generally subscribe to a multicultural studies model that steers well clear of social justice oriented and consciousness-raising history; history that confirms Patton's (but also Angela Y. Davis's, Cornel West's, and Michelle Alexander's, to name a few) assertion that violence, death, incarceration, and the stripping of humanity are tradition in this country. Instead of a history curriculum that acknowledges the humanity of—and confers dignity unto—people of color, this multicultural studies model preferences a curriculum that "celebrates" people of color through diversity of "culture" (food, language, traditional dress, etc.), and through this focus, students are very rarely exposed to aspects of American history that provide dimension and complexity to the narrative. Further, when social justice oriented educational programs are formed, such as Tucson Unified School District's Mexican-American Studies program in Arizona, they are effectively challenged and banned by government based on legislative claims that programs such as these:[3]

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1. See: http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/05/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-fast-facts/ for more information on the controversial 2012 shooting of black teen Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, who in 2013 was found not guilty of murder.
2. The period after US President Abraham Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation" of 1863, that set into effect the abolition of American slavery, and the freeing of millions of black slaves.
3. See: http://www.azcentral.com/news/politics/articles/20130311arizona-ethnic-studies-ban-ruling.html for the most up-to-date information regarding the ban of TUSD's Ethnic Studies program.

— Promote the overthrow of the United States Government.
— Promote resentment toward a race or class of people.
— Are courses designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group.
— Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals. (State of Arizona 1–2)

The assumptions asserted through these government restrictions on education paired together with the example of Michael Brown's death at the hands of a white police officer, combined with the ensuing racialized division in perception of this tragedy, are but a few microcosmic examples of an overarching issue in the US; the issue of attitudes and belief that we as a nation and people are in an era of post-raciality and that color blindness is the preferable racial attitude to maintain. It is because of these racial attitudes that scholarship of critical race theorists has not lost or lessened in its relevance, and I venture to argue that this work, through its theories and methods, is as necessary now as it ever was if we as scholar-teachers are to challenge the white supremacist status quo in the educational institution. As a response to the contemporary state of race and racism, this essay will review major theories about race and will suggest Critical Race Theory and its methodology of counterstory as a tool by which scholar-teachers can intervene in and disrupt the color blind narrative of post-raciality.

Why Critical Race Theory?

"Does racism still exist?" This question expressed by a university student in the very first college-level course I ever taught is the impetus for my work in Critical Race Theory (CRT). In United States history courses, US students are taught about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Many come away from this experience with the idea that "racism," as a term, is defined as isolated blatant acts of violence or discrimination toward *individuals* of color. The key word in this equation is "individual," for racism is still commonly imagined as only visible behavior from one individual toward another (Bonilla–Silva 8). Or as Michael Omi and Howard Winant assert, racism, and the

"common sense" surrounding its definition, is "generally understood in a more limited fashion, as a matter of prejudiced attitudes or bigotry […] and discriminatory practices" (133). Racism, as imagined and expressed in the US, has a historic visibility that very much informs the visual historic landscape more generally associated with the era of Jim Crow (spanning 1876–1965) racism and racist policies and practices.[4] This blatant meaning of racism forms the contemporary general understanding of what constitutes racism in the US, and students in our public institutions are taught in primary and secondary school that the Civil Rights Movement worked to eliminate racism as understood through these forms of derogatory and segregationist behavior (Olson 211). While the Civil Rights Movement dismantled racism *de jure*, the racisms of systemic and institutional prejudice, discrimination, and inequities remain and very much inform the lived realities for people of color in the US.

In *Racial Formations*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant contend that contemporary race as a categorization of human bodies is an unstable and "'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" (123). Further, they assert the permanence of race as a category 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 (124). Racial formation then is the theory that explains the "sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (124). In terms of racism, Omi and Winant (along with many more race theorists) point to the structural features of racism in US society as a product of "centuries of systemic exclusion, exploitation, and disregard of racially defined minorities" (133). The contemporary era of racism, termed "color blind racism"

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4. "Jim Crow" refers to an era of US racism in which racial segregation laws between whites and blacks (but also, in some instances and regions, other racially minoritized groups such as Mexican–Americans, Native American, and Asian American) were enacted between 1876 and 1965. Jim Crow segregation included, but was not limited to the separation of white from racialized minorities in public schools, public transportation, restrooms, restaurants, and drinking fountains. In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States declared state-sponsored school segregation unconstitutional, and generally, the remaining Jim Crow laws were overruled by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

by Eduardo Bonilla–Silva, is best characterized by the combination of prejudice, discrimination, and institutional inequality.

The Effects of a Racist Legacy in a Post-Civil Rights America

According to Michael Omi and Howard Winant, race in the US is endemic; it is deeply ingrained in American life through historical consciousness and ideological choices about race which then influence and shape societal structures and functions such as discourse and rhetoric. Eduardo Bonilla–Silva, in his work on color blind racism, analyzes the rhetoric of race and "racetalk" through frames that work as tropes. These tropes serve to recognize the power "racetalk" possesses, and Bonilla–Silva views this rhetoric as a way for whites to establish and maintain their position of dominance (Villanueva "Blind" 5). Particular to this essay is Bonilla–Silva's argument that the rhetoric of "color blind racism," the current and dominant racial ideology in the US, constructs a social reality for people of color in its practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial (3). He further argues that this race rhetoric supports a hierarchical racialized status quo that maintains white privilege and superiority.

According to Bonilla–Silva, color blind racism is an ideology that acquired "cohesiveness and dominance in the late 1960s, [and] explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics" (2). For example, Jim Crow racism of the pre-Civil Rights Era maintained a means in its rhetoric of explaining people of color's social standing in biological and moral terms. Furthermore, the rhetoric of Jim Crow racism explains that people of color are underrepresented in, for example, higher education because of erroneous beliefs about this group's inferior intelligence due to biological factors such as smaller brain size and unfavorable breeding. However, color blind racism does not rely on such a simplistic argument and instead rationalizes people of color's current social status as a product of "market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and minorities' self-imposed cultural limitations" (Bonilla–Silva 2). Thus, color blind racism would explain African American lack of representation in the academy as owing to the group's

own cultural lack of valuing education. In this way, racism has shifted from "blaming the victim" practices based on *biological* shortcomings to blaming practices that focus on the victim's shortcomings rooted in culture or ethnicity.[5]

The ideology of color blind racism relies on four frames that Bonilla–Silva terms: abstract liberalism, naturalization of race, cultural racism, and minimization of racism (26). These frames are central to this ideology and can be utilized toward interpreting and analyzing the discourse of color blind racism that in turn influences and produces structural effects of a dominant racial ideology. Abstract liberalism is the frame that involves the use of ideas associated with political liberalism such as choice and individualism. These ideas are applied in an abstract manner to explain racial matters such as opposition to affirmative action policies because these policies involve supposed preferential treatment, which under the frame of abstract liberalism can be rationalized as a practice opposed to the principle of equal opportunity. However, this claim necessitates ignoring the fact that people of color are severely underrepresented in most good jobs, schools, and universities; hence, it is an abstract utilization of the idea of equal opportunity. Another example involves regarding each person, regardless of social status, as an individual with choices, while ignoring the multiple structural and state-sponsored practices preventing marginalized peoples from making individual choices about supposed equal opportunity.

The frame of naturalization of racism allows those situated in the dominant culture to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting that they are natural occurrences. For example, groups can claim the contemporary persistence of segregation of neighborhoods and schools is natural because people from all backgrounds gravitate toward likeness citing that it is "just the way things are." Cultural racism, as a frame, relies on culturally based arguments such as "Mexicans do not value education" or "Blacks are violent people" to explain the standing of

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5. Linda M. Burton et al. define "ethnicity" as a reference to "a subset of people whose members share common national, ancestral, cultural, immigration, or religious characteristics that distinguish them from other groups" (440).

people of color in society. These views, once explained as biological, have been replaced by cultural ones that are just as effective in defending the racial status quo. The fourth frame, minimization of racism, suggests that discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting marginalized peoples life chances (e.g. "It's better now than in the past" or "There is discrimination, but there are still plenty of opportunities out there"). This frame accounts for society's divisiveness in racial perception concerning cases like the above discussed shooting of Michael Brown. In this case, the people of color who constitute the 80% that believe Michael Brown's death raises important issues about race are accused of being "hypersensitive," of using race as an "excuse," or of "playing the (infamous) race card" ("Stark Racial Divisions" 1). More significantly, this frame also involves regarding discrimination exclusively as all-out racist behavior, which given the way color blind racism works, makes anything outside of blatant and easily recognizable racist behavior, whether individual or structural, "non-racist."

Contemporary racial inequality is reproduced through color blind racist practices that are subtle, structural, and apparently non-racial, and again, in contrast to the Jim Crow era where racial inequality and segregation were enforced through explicit means (e.g. signs in business windows saying "No Niggers, Spics, or dogs"), today's racial practices operate in often obscure and not readily detectable ways (Bonilla–Silva 3). Bonilla–Silva asserts,

> the ideology of color blindness seems like "racism lite," as it "others" softly and suggests people of color lag behind the success and achievement of whites because they do not work hard enough, do not value American ideals of success and achievement, do not take advantage of the equal opportunity available to them, and complain too much while making too many excuses for themselves based on the country's racist past (that is assumed to be something truly of the past ending with the Civil Rights movement). (4)

In response to this "new racism," scholars of color in law created Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Critical Race Theory

CRT originated in the field of law and emerged as a reaction against the critical legal studies (CLS) movement due to the failure on the part of CLS to acknowledge how race is a central component to the very systems of law being challenged. It is informed, too, by civil rights scholarship and feminist thought. CRT first circulated in US law schools, bringing together issues of power, race, and racism to address power imbalances particularly as these are racialized. In 1989, after continued dissatisfaction with the failures of CLS, a number of lawyers left this group and formed Critical Race Theory. Co-founding member, Mari Matsuda defines CRT as:

> The work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination. (1331)

The body of work by Critical Race Theory scholars Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Kimberlé Crenshaw addresses the liberal notion of color blindness and argues that ignoring racial difference maintains and perpetuates the "status quo with all of its deeply institutionalized injustices to racial minorities" and insists that "dismissing the importance of race is a way to guarantee that institutionalized and systematic racism continues and even prospers" (Olson 211).

Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas cite the Legal Realist movement of the 1920s and '30s—a body of scholarship that made its case for legal interpretation being political and not neutral or objective—and Oliver Wendell Holmes's 1881 observation of the judge's "predilections and social situation" as the earliest foundations for what would during the Civil Rights Era become Critical Legal Studies (xviii). In the 1970s CLS scholars charged that the law is not and cannot be disinterested in the status quo. These scholars declared the law as established by societal power relationships and court decisions as reflective of this bias with a mask of blind legitimacy. Critical Race Theory (CRT) arose out of lived experiences of students

and teachers in US law schools who experienced and were witness to CLS and liberal civil rights ideology that failed to address the "constrictive role that racial ideology plays in the composition and culture of American institutions" (xix).

The earliest cited event contributing to the development of CRT was the 1981 student protest, boycott, and resulting organization of an alternative course on race and the law at Harvard Law School. This course was organized in reaction to the liberal white Harvard administration's refusal to hire a teacher of color to replace Derrick Bell, who left the institution in 1980. Bell, one of only two African American law professors at Harvard Law following the Civil Rights Movement, developed and taught legal doctrine from a race-conscious viewpoint and used racial politics as the organizing concept for scholarly study. His course textbook, *Race, and Racism and American Law*, and his own opposition to the traditional liberal approach to racism, are cited by CRT scholars as central to the development of the movement. However, when Bell left Harvard to become Dean of University of Oregon Law School, student activists who demanded the hire of a professor of color were told by the Harvard administration that "there were no qualified black scholars who merited Harvard's interest" (xx). "The Alternative Course" was the student response to this administrative assertion. This course encompassed a student-led continuation of Bell's course which focused on US law through the "prism of race" (xxi). It was the first institutionalized expression of CRT and was one of the earliest attempts to bring scholars of color together "to address the law's treatment of race from a self-consciously critical perspective" (xxii). But more importantly, the existence of this course challenged the mainstream liberal notion of what subject matters were of enough value to include in standardized curriculum and provided CRT scholars the opportunity to express viewpoints on topics not traditionally privileged in mainstream law schools (xxii).

The second event cited as owing to the foundations of CRT is the 1987 Critical Legal Studies National conference on silence and race, which as Crenshaw et al. state, "marked the genesis of an intellectually distinctive critical account of race on terms set forth by race-conscious scholars of color, and the terms of contestation and coalition with CLS"

(xix). The project of CRT then became the effort to uncover how law constructed race; "the pervasive ways in which law shapes and is shaped by 'race relations' across the social plane" (xxv). The separation then of CRT from CLS was based in the dissatisfaction with CLS' failure to come to terms with the particularity of race and the movement of CLS to deploy racialist critiques "from a position on race that was close if not identical to the liberalism" CRT scholars were otherwise joined with CLS scholars in opposing. However, instead of arguing (as did classical liberalism) that race was irrelevant to public policy, CLS argued that race simply did not exist (xxvi). This assertion found its basis in the notion that biological race was a myth; however, scholars of this inclination failed to note the lived material realities of the social construction that is race. Crenshaw et al. see CLS and CRT "as aligned—in radical left opposition to mainstream legal discourse," but the authors assert CRT is also different from CLS, stating their "focus on race means that [they] have addressed quite different concerns, with distinct methodologies and traditions that [are] honored" (xxvi–ii).

Concerning the traditions of Critical Race Theory, CRT is characterized by premises/themes/elements. The number of premises varies depending on how the elements are parsed out by varying CRT scholars. However, the resounding themes can be described in the following ways; first, racism is a central, permanent, and "normal" part of US society (Dixson and Rousseau 4; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 312; Taylor 73–77). As Delgado and Stefancic state, "Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture" (xvi). Taylor asserts "assumptions of White superiority are so ingrained in political, legal, and educational structures that they are almost unrecognizable […] [and] because it is all-encompassing and omnipresent, it cannot be easily recognized by its beneficiaries" (73–74).[6] Ironically, the result is that whites cannot see

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6. Cornel West in his "A Genealogy of Modern Racism" traces the emergence of "the idea of white supremacy within the modern discourse in the West," and asserts that "it is important to note that the idea of white supremacy not only was accepted by [prominent Enlightenment figures such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Jefferson, and Hume], but, more important, it was accepted by them without their having to put forward their own arguments to justify it" (105, emphasis in original).

or understand the world they have made and are in many cases quick to dismiss or deny the inherited privilege associated with whiteness. Bell describes 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" (198). However, people of color have experiential knowledge from having lived under such systems of racism and oppression, and thus have developed methodologies that serve as both coping mechanisms and as ways to raise awareness of issues affecting people of color that are often overlooked, not considered, or otherwise invisible to whites.

A second premise of CRT resides in its commitment to the centrality of experiential knowledge as detailed through narrative (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 314; Taylor 74; Delgado and Stefancic xvii–xviii). Because whites do not often acknowledge the experiences of people of color, CRT recognizes and has developed the methodology of counterstory to relate the racial realities of people of color while also providing marginalized people a means to challenge "the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render [minoritized people] one-down" (Delgado and Stefancic xvii). However, people of color can and do reproduce structures, systems, and practices of racism too, but by writing and speaking against the oftentimes one-sided stories existing in a white supremacist world, CRT scholars illuminate the fact that the social world is not static, but is constructed by people with words, stories, and also silences. CRT narrative recognizes experiential knowledge of the non-dominant as "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, and analyzing racial subordination" (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 314) and a CRT scholar constructs counterstory with a deep commitment toward social justice and elimination of racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (Dixson and Rousseau 4).

In the effort to end all forms of oppression, a third premise of CRT challenges dominant claims of race neutrality, equal opportunity, objectivity, color blindness, and merit (Dixson and Rousseau 4; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 313). This challenge takes on the hard

task of calling into question dominant ideology, and 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" (313). This self-interest has been most notably discussed by Derrick Bell through his development of interest convergence theory. Bell's concept holds that "white elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for [people of color] only when such advances also promote white self-interest" (xvii). The most commonly referenced example of this theory resides in the 1954 *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case, 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 US racial brutality were more readily available to the world. Communist powers such as the Soviet Union and China sparked international sensation 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 the undermining of the US as a model of democracy as the country strove to position itself as a leading force of anti-communism. 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 (76).

Because the task of challenging dominant ideology is an enormous undertaking, CRT scholars have fielded this concern through an interdisciplinary approach. A fourth premise of CRT is the valuing of an interdisciplinary perspective as scholars challenge "ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses" while insisting "on analyzing race and racism […] by placing them both in a historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods" (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 314). Considering CRT's foundations in the fields of law, education, and sociology, and its development out of civil rights and feminist thought, both theory and method are shouldered by many scholars from a variety of fields who have and continue to contribute viewpoints that challenge, support, and in the end, strengthen the overall goals of Critical Race Theory.

Counterstory: A CRT Method

As a theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory made way for the emergence of critical race counterstory, a methodology utilized in scholarly publications, particularly in Derrick Bell's landmark allegorical chronicles of Geneva Crenshaw (*And We Are Not Saved* 1987; *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* 1992), and Richard Delgado's narrative dialogue Rodrigo chronicles (*The Rodrigo Chronicles* 1995). Delgado theorized counterstory as a methodology in his article "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative" and defines a variety of counterstory forms and styles including but not limited to chronicles, narratives, allegories, parables, pungent tales, and dialogues (2413 & 2438). Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) scholars Dolores Delgado Bernal, Daniel Solórzano, and Tara J. Yosso further theorized and extended critical race counterstory as a necessary and legitimate method of critical inquiry for marginalized scholars, particularly those from cultures where the oral tradition is valued.

As an off-shoot of CRT, LatCrit draws on the strengths offered by Critical Race Theory, while also emphasizing "the intersectionality of experience with oppression and resistance and the need to extend the conversation" (Yosso, "Toward a Critical" 95) beyond the inadequate dualistic conceptual framework offered by the black-white binary. According to Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, LatCrit is:

> concerned with a sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity and addresses the issues often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality […] [it] is conceived as an antisubordination and antiessentialist project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community […]. LatCrit theory is supplementary [and] complimentary to critical race theory [and] at its best should operate as a close cousin—related to [CRT] in real and lasting ways, but not necessarily living under the same roof. (311–312)

LatCrit scholars assert their commitment to intersectionality, and counterstory serves as a natural extension of inquiry for theorists whose

research recognizes that experiential and embodied knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism, which is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 314).

Solórzano and Yosso assert that "majoritarian" stories are generated from a legacy of racial privilege and are stories in which racial privilege seems "natural" (27). These stories privilege whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference. A majoritarian story distorts and silences the experiences of people of color and others distanced from the norms such stories reproduce. A standardized majoritarian methodology relies on stock stereotypes that covertly and overtly link people of color, women of color, and poverty with "bad," while emphasizing that white, middle and/or upper class people embody all that is "good" (Solórzano and Yosso 29). Whites can and do tell counterstories, and people of color, in contrast, can and do tell majoritarian stories (Bonilla–Silva 151; Martinez, "The American Way" 586). The keepers and tellers of either majoritarian (stock) stories or counterstories reveal the social location of the storyteller as dominant or non-dominant, and these locations are always racialized, classed, and gendered. For example, Ward Connerly is African American, from a working class background, male, and a prominent politician and academic. From his racialized position, Connerly is a minority, but he speaks and represents himself from dominant gendered and classed locations. From the position of an upper class male, Connerly crafts stock stories to argue against affirmative action and to deny racial inequities. Alternatively, Condon's work narrativizes embodied whiteness and individual responsibility as a white ally. Although Condon is white, she is also a woman who speaks from a non-dominant social location, while as a white ally, she uses her dominant racialized location to craft critical race narratives that disrupt "discourses of transcendence" often responsible for leading audiences of white anti-racists to believe they are somehow "absolved from the responsibility of doing whiteness" (13).

As a rhetorical method, critical race counterstory is a theoretically grounded research approach that draws on an interdisciplinary

approach with roots in ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, the humanities, and the law. According to LatCrit scholar Dolores Delgado Bernal, a critical race methodology challenges white privilege, rejects notions of "neutral" research or "objective" research, and exposes research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color (see also Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*). Importantly, this 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. A critical race methodology includes a range of methods such as storytelling, family histories, biographies, cuentos, testimonios, and counterstory. Counterstory functions as a method to empower the marginalized through the formation of stories with which to intervene in the erasures accomplished in "majoritarian" stories or "master narratives."

In all, it is crucial to use theory and methodology that counters theory and methodology that seeks to dismiss or decenter racism and those whose lives are daily affected by it. Counterstory, then, is a method of telling stories of those 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 and can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance. In my field of Rhetoric and Writing Studies, Gary A. Olson and others have called for greater attention in the field toward CRT in order to better prepare both institutionally and pedagogically for students from underrepresented backgrounds. I suggest counterstory as a method by which to incorporate CRT in humanities-oriented fields of study, as a contribution of other(ed) perspectives toward ongoing and crucial conversations about dominant ideology and its influences on the institution, society, and the very humanity of people of color, a humanity too often denied.

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