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Critical Race Theory being Taught in School

Throughout history there have been a bunch of different changes to the curriculums throughout schools. The hope for those coming out of school is to gain knowledge and become a functioning and valuable citizen in their society wherever that may be. Recently, one of the main topics that is being debated regarding what should be taught in schools is around critical race theory which is also known as CRT. There are multiple working definitions but I believe the best way to describe it is “a set of ideas holding that racial bias is inherent in many parts of western society, especially in its legal and social institutions, on the basis of their having been primarily designed for and implemented by white people.” America has made its history a big part of its education systems curriculum, however it doesn’t tell the complete story. Slavery, racism, and discrimination has been a part of America pretty much from its start. Communities of color have been violated, taken advantage of, and pushed down for generations on generations. With critical race theory, it allows people to see how those same racial tendencies and acts of discrimination are still present today but are just presented differently. If one of the education systems main goals is to prepare students for society, then it should teach the actual reality of the society and not just the image of what they portray it to be. I believe that critical race theory should be taught in schools because it prepares people for the reality of the world that they live in and gives them the information to succeed and even change it for the better.

One of the things that should be acknowledged in this debate is that Critical Race Theory is not actively taught in all schools. In most cases it is spoken briefly for a lesson or in cases of college there may be a class that is taught on it. Personally I did not know about critical race theory until I got into college, and even then most of my knowledge of what it was came mainly through my own research on the topic. Now CRT mainly started to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s as a response to a lot of the limitations that the civil rights movement had. It broadens the scope from the individual to the society because it is hard to pinpoint how one person's potentially racist tendencies affects a larger group of people. One example of society's earliest incorporation of racism into its legal system is found in the article "Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications" by William F. Tate IV. In the article it states "The United States has a long history of attempting to use the courts and legal remedies to resolve racial injustice (Allen, 1974; Roberts v. City of Boston, 1850). However, by the turn of the 20th century the doctrine of "separate but equal" was the law of the land (Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896). The separate-but-equal doctrine reflected the prevailing social temperament, a belief in the inherent inferiority of African Americans that made it impossible for Whites to see themselves sharing public accommodations with Blacks (Bogle, 1989; Dred Scott v. Sandford, 1857; Jefferson, 1954; Peters, 1982; Selden, 1994)." Legally America did its job but in reality it was just a poor attempt at satisfying everyone. Communities of color at that time still had run down facilities, low paying job opportunities, and still had trouble with political equality because of other restrictive voting laws. To think that something of this magnitude is not taught on a bigger scale kind of makes me nervous because this affects more than just communities of color. This speaks to the importance of CRT. For change to take place in society, people need to be educated on the problems that the change is required for. It is easy for people to believe that racism and

discrimination is not embedded into the way our lives run because we are taught and led to believe that America is the land of the free and that everyone has a fair chance. Through the lens of CRT people are able to understand how race and racism intersect with law, politics, and social institutions.

Something else to acknowledge in this debate is why would people be opposed to CRT. It is also important to realize that not every stance against it is directed to its core principles and goals but rather how it operates on a broader spectrum. For some an example would be that they believe that CRT is not appropriate for K-12 classrooms. CRT can get very complicated and with younger minds still growing and coming up with their own beliefs, it can be hard to grasp. To be fair there are moments where even adults struggle to grasp what CRT is and how it affects them. However all information at some point was hard to grasp. I think it is crucial to learn things along these lines at a young age because it shapes how you operate as an adult. In some cases many young people already experience parts of CRT because of their circumstances so it would be best to give them the information they can use to invoke change. Another counter argument against CRT is that it invokes a victim mentality. Some people see it as CRT causes people to focus more on the specific race or group that they identify as instead of a community as a whole. This can very well be a possibility but I believe that comes down to how CRT is being taught to the individual. When it is taught right it acknowledges the different experiences that people have encountered and brings everyone to a place of understanding on how things can change for the better. CRT does not point fingers at a specific group of people and says to blame them for the way the world is. A lot of systems and laws that CRT analyzes were things that were set in place by previous generations, and a lot of people in today's time do not even know that it's wrong

because they were not properly educated on it. CRT shows everyone that they have a part to play in the change that needs to be made regardless of your background.

Another major part of the debate is how does CRT affect the individual. When faced with information like this there is never a guaranteed way for people to respond but the same thing can be said about any type of information. Having conversations about race can be nerve wrecking, but to truly embrace diversity means to acknowledge the things that make us different. Instead of living in a world where “people don’t see color” we need to live in a world where we do see it but accept people regardless of it. With learning about CRT it allows people to become more aware of other people’s backgrounds and experiences. With that increased awareness it would translate to how a person's race translates to different systems in society. Systemic racism would be brought to the forefront which in turn would allow more people to get involved in making changes. Having a society that is informed and equipped to make change would lead to changes in our legal systems that would be more equitable to all. This would take place through voting and society holding our political leaders accountable. It all starts with teaching and even teachers have pushed to have more conversations and lessons on race to be incorporated into the curriculum. According to the article “Perceptions of Teaching Race and Gender: Results of a Survey of Social Studies Teachers” by Kaylene Stevens and Christopher Martell, there was a survey conducted on a sample of high school social studies teachers in Massachusetts about teaching race and gender. Two major points that came from the results was “social studies teachers reported that they were comfortable teaching about race and gender, that race and gender inequity should be addressed in the social studies classroom, and that they regularly covered race- and gender-related topics” and “teachers responded that race and gender were not adequately covered in the curriculum and they wanted more professional development on

teaching race and gender.” If the schools are expected to prepare students for life after, these conversations should be incorporated to prepare them fully.

Another component of this debate that should be addressed is how CRT should be taught. With how complex it can get and the different viewpoints that can come from it, it is important to think about how teachers can be prepared to have these conversations. Now beyond the actual educational systems taking the stand to incorporate CRT and other talks of race, there is a personal commitment and responsibility that would fall on the teachers. This is major because not every class is the same and not everyone will receive something the same way. One of the things that teachers can do is educate themselves about CRT. Doing your own research can help you grasp something on a higher level than if you were just hearing it from someone else. Another thing that would need to be taken into consideration is the students' backgrounds. Teachers are able to build very special connections with students so learning about them can in turn help with mapping out lessons that would be beneficial to the whole class. With any form of education, a safe and respectful learning environment is crucial. With discussions of race there are always questions and comments that will pop up. Learning how to maneuver through that can really enhance the experience overall. One way that can be done is incorporating conversations among the students. They can be based on their own experiences, things that are confusing them, or things that they are taking away from the lessons. I believe that through those conversations it builds the true sense of diversity and exposes students to things that they may not have known. Also through the feedback from the students, the teachers would also get the chance to evaluate how things are going and what they can work on to make the lessons stronger. In time students would be more open and expressive about the differences in their classrooms and situations that they go through and it would make them more comfortable to face it later on in life.

Although CRT or conversations about race can be taught throughout any stage, I believe it is especially important in High school. During that time people are really starting to figure out the foundation of who they are and it is the final step before they step out into the real world. Not saying that they weren't living in the real world before, but once you leave high school it's almost as if a safety net is removed. The responsibility of life increases while the instruction and guidance starts to fall off. Diving deeper into CRT while in high school really helps prepare the students for things that they will experience if they haven't already. This way while they discover more of who they are, they already have the lens of how it interacts with the society around them. As history has gone on we have seen that problems of racism and discrimination have always been constant. The only thing that has changed is how it is displayed. Learning how to see it is part of the preparation for taking the steps to deal with it. Today we still face things like police brutality, racial profiling, hate crimes, wealth disparities and so much more. I believe much change doesn't take place because the real conversations about it are not had. To be in a time where all of this information is so accessible in every way possible, yet everyone steers away from the conversation leaves the space for inequality to live on. When things make the headlines they are trending for a bit and everyone acts as if they care until the next headline takes place and the cycle repeats itself over and over. Incorporating these conversations into the curriculum will allow a shift in a systematic way especially focusing on that highschool range. Even alongside the teaching of CRT, the legal systems should be focused on more alongside it. Teaching kids the importance of voting and how the legal system works would make way for more change to take place. In my personal experience I only just started learning more about the legal system and I'm in my second year of college and for some, they may experience that even

later. Having things like this be a requirement allows people to be in a stance where they are ready to make change regardless of what point of their life that they're in.

Overall I believe that incorporating Critical Race Theory into curriculums is more than just a class to pass. Through its teachings, people are learning life skills that are beneficial to everyone no matter what career path they decide. Diversity is everywhere and critical race theory gives people the tools on how to embrace it completely. Although the goal may seem very big, it all starts with the baby steps. This is something that can't be placed on just one person or group to handle but it truly requires everyone to do its place. Just like any change there will be opposition for many reasons but if the effort and time is put in to handle it correctly, then people can start to take the steps into a new world that is truly equitable for everyone.

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