

Images and Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Racial Stereotyping, and Teacher Education

By Daniel G. Solorzano

Introduction

The major and overriding psychiatric problem of the black minority is the withering effect of racism. Hence the sociocultural and community aim must be to dilute, undercut, and eliminate racism wherever and however it is located. (Pierce, 1974, p. 512)

...it is time to "get real" about race and the persistence of racism in America. (Bell, 1992, p. 5)

These two epigraphs by Chester Pierce and Derrick Bell are reminders of the lingering significance of racism and our inability to eliminate it from United States society. In this essay, I examine the linkages between an emerging theoretical framework in the law—critical race theory—and its relation and application to the concepts of race, racism, and racial stereotyping in teacher education.

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Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory draws from and extends a broad literature base that is often termed critical theory. Therefore, I borrow and adapt the works of Brian Fay (1987) and William Tierney (1991, 1993)

and define critical theory as a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color.¹ Similarly, Mari Matsuda (1991) defines critical race theory 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. (p. 1331)

Specifically, critical race theory challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to the law² by examining how legal doctrine is used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Bell, 1995; Calmore, 1992; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Harris, 1994; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).

Critical race theory has at least five themes that form its basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy:

1. The Centrality and Intersectionality of Race and Racism

Critical race theory starts from the premise that race and racism are endemic, permanent, and in the words of Margaret Russell (1992) “a central rather than marginal factor in defining and explaining individual experiences of the law” (pp. 762-3). Critical race theorists also take the position that racism has at least four dimensions: (1) it has micro and macro components; (2) it takes on institutional and individual forms; (3) it has conscious and unconscious elements; and (4) it has a cumulative impact on both the individual and group (Davis, 1989; Lawrence, 1987). Although race and racism are at the center of a critical race analysis, they are also viewed at their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993). As Robin Barnes (1990) has stated, “Critical Race Scholars have refused to ignore the differences between class and race as basis for oppression.... Critical Race Scholars know that class oppression alone cannot account for racial oppression” (p. 1868).

2. The Challenge to Dominant Ideology

Critical race theory challenges the traditional claims of the legal system to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. The critical race theorists argue that these traditional claims are a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society (Calmore, 1992). In addition to challenging the way we examine race and racism, Kimberle Crenshaw and her colleagues have argued that critical race theory is also trying to “piece together an intellectual identity and a political practice that would take the form both of a left intervention into race discourse and a race intervention into left discourse” (Crenshaw *et al.*, 1995, p. xix).

3. The Commitment to Social Justice

Critical race theory has an overall commitment to social justice and the elimination of racism. In the critical race theorist's struggle toward social justice, the abolition of racism or racial subordination is part of the broader goal of ending other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation (Matsuda, 1991).

4. The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge

Critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of Women and Men of Color are legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, practicing, and teaching the law and its relation to racial subordination (Calmore, 1992). Indeed, critical race theory views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on the Person of Color's lived experiences by including such methods as storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Olivas, 1990).

5. The Interdisciplinary Perspective

Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses and insists on analyzing race and racism in the law by placing them in both an historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Garcia, 1995; Harris, 1994; Olivas, 1990).

Therefore, to paraphrase and extend Matsuda's definition, the overall goal of a critical race theory in teacher education focuses on the work of progressive Teacher Educators of Color and their Fellow Travelers who are trying to develop a pedagogy, curriculum, and research agenda that accounts for the role of race and racism in U.S. education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination in education.

Using the five themes of critical race theory, I will focus this essay on racial stereotypes that occur in the popular and professional media. I do this to better understand how we can identify, analyze, and transform those aspects of education that use racial stereotypes to maintain the subordination of Students of Color. In this pedagogical exercise, I begin by defining race, racism, and racial stereotypes. I then examine how both the popular media and professional racial stereotypes are used to justify certain teacher attitudes and behaviors toward Students of Color. By engaging in this exercise on race, racism, and racial stereotyping, we challenge ourselves and our students to develop alternative ways of viewing race, and work toward the elimination of racism and racial stereotypes in our classrooms.

Defining Race, Racism, and Racial Stereotyping

In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois (1989) commented that "the problem of the 20th

Century is the problem of the color-line" (p. 29). When we examine the popular and professional literature, and the political debates around immigration, welfare, crime, and affirmative action, it appears that DuBois's prophecy will continue into the Twenty-First Century. In dealing with the issue of "color" or race, history has shown that the U.S. has never been a "color-blind" society (Gotanda, 1991). The U.S. is very color conscious and color affects the way people view their separate and interrelated worlds (Dalton, 1987, 1995; Duster, 1993). A longitudinal investigation of public opinion polls on racial/ethnic and social issues illustrates that Blacks, Latinos, and Whites have very different positions on a variety of social issues (ABC News, 1996; Gates & West, 1996; Schuman, Steeh, & Bobo, 1985).

According to James Banks (1995), an examination of U.S. history reveals that the "color-line" or race is a socially constructed category, created to differentiate racial groups, and to show the superiority or dominance of one race over another. This position leads to the question: Does the dominance of a racial group require a rationalizing ideology? One could argue that dominant groups try to legitimate their interests through the use of an ideology (*i.e.*, a set of beliefs that explains or justifies some actual or potential social arrangement). If racism is the ideology that justifies the dominance of one race over another, then how do we define racism? For our purpose, Audre Lorde (1992) may have produced the most concise definition of racism as "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (p. 496). Manning Marable (1992) has also defined racism as "a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color" (p. 5). Indeed, embedded in the Lorde and Marable definitions of racism are at least three important points: (1) one group believes itself to be superior; (2) the group which believes itself to be superior has the power to carry out the racist behavior; and (3) racism effects multiple racial/ethnic groups. These two definitions take the position that racism is about institutional power, and People of Color in the United States have never possessed this form of power.

A critical race theory in teacher education seeks answers to the following questions: What forms does racism take in teacher education and how are these forms used to maintain the subordination of Students of Color? To answer this question, I begin by defining and examining racial stereotypes. Indeed, Gordon Allport (1979) has defined a stereotype as:

An exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category. (p. 191)

This definition provides a valuable tool for teacher educators to examine how racial stereotypes are used to justify certain attitudes and behaviors toward Students of Color.

Racial Stereotyping and Students of Color

Popular Racial Stereotypes and Students of Color

Using Allport's (1979) definition, I created Figure 1 to show how racial and ethnic stereotypes can be placed into at least three general categories: (1) intelligence and educational stereotypes; (2) personality or character stereotypes; and (3) physical appearance stereotypes. Indeed, these racial stereotypes and related conduct toward Blacks, Chicanas/os, and Native Americans are often times interchangeable between the groups. The fact that Blacks, Chicanas/os, and Native Americans have been and are sometimes seen in the popular media of television, film, and print as "dumb," "violent," "lazy," "irresponsible," or "dirty" can be used

Figure 1
Racial Stereotypes as Justification for Conduct towards People of Color

<u>Exaggerated</u> <u>Belief</u>	→	<u>Associated</u> <u>with a Category</u>	→	<u>And Its Function Is</u> <u>to Justify Conduct</u> <u>toward that Category</u>
Intelligence/ Educational Stereotypes				
"stupid"	→	Blacks	→	segregated schools
"dumb"	→	Chicanas/os	→	low expectations
"slow"	→	Native Americans	→	menial jobs
Personality/ Character Stereotypes				
"violent"	→	Blacks	→	segregated communities
"lazy"	→	Chicanas/os	→	segregated communities
"savage"	→	Native Americans	→	reservations
Physical Appearance Stereotypes				
"unclean"	→	Blacks	→	segregated public facilities
"dirty"	→	Chicanas/os	→	segregated public facilities
"scary"	→	Native Americans	→	segregated housing

Adapted from G. Allport. *The Nature of Prejudice*. 25th Anniversary Edition. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979.

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to rationalize their subordinate position in society (Berkeley Art Center, 1982; Bonilla & Girling, 1973). In reality, these stereotypic traits can be used to justify: (1) having low educational and occupational expectations for Students of Color; (2) placing Students of Color in separate schools and, in some cases, separate classrooms within schools; (3) remediating the curriculum and pedagogy for Students of Color; (4) maintaining segregated communities and facilities for People of Color; and (5) expecting Students of Color to one day occupy certain types and levels of occupations. In fact, when we think of welfare, crime, drugs, immigrants, and educational problems, we racialize these issues by painting stereotypic portraits of People of Color (Omi & Winant, 1994).

It is important to note that these outward or public stereotypes are usually not socially condoned and their use in the public discourse is rare. However, it is in the private discourse that they manifest themselves in more subtle ways. Indeed, unconscious and more subtle forms of stereotyping, while pervasive, are seldom investigated (Delgado & Stefancic, 1992; Lawrence, 1987; Pierce, 1974, 1978). Perhaps, we need to examine those situations where People of Color are absent, and where Whites can feel safe to express their "real" feelings about People of Color (see ABC News, 1996). If we could examine and analyze the private conversations of Whites in such diverse settings as teacher lounges, sports bars, and professional meetings, then we might begin to better understand how Whites perceive People of Color. To reach that point, Harlon Dalton (1995) has argued that Whites have "to conceive of themselves as members of a race and to recognize the advantages that attach to simply having white skin" (p. 6). Andrew Hacker (1992) has raised the question: Can we place a price on being White in the United States? However, Dalton (1995) goes on to state that most Whites don't see themselves in racial terms because

in settings where Whites dominate, being White is not noteworthy. It is like the tick of a familiar clock, part of the easily tuned-out background noise. (p. 6)

Dalton (1995) further asserts that if Whites were placed in an unfamiliar setting where they do not dominate they may begin to see themselves racially and "would most likely feel whiter than white walking along 125th Street in Harlem" (p. 6). In the teacher education classroom, the racial/ethnic experiences of Whites and other non-minorities can be an important part of the discussion and analysis of the advantages and privileges of being White in the U.S. (see Allen, 1993; Dalton, 1995; Hacker, 1992; Halewood, 1995; Scheurich, 1993a, 1993b; Sleeter, 1993, 1994).

Occasionally, People of Color get a glimpse into this world of subtle and unconscious racism and racial stereotyping (Lawrence, 1987). For instance, the following remarks are often heard by People of Color:

"When I talk about those Blacks, I really wasn't talking about you."
"You're not like the rest of them. You're different."

"If only there were more of them like you."

"I don't think of you as a Mexican."

"You speak such good English."

"But you speak without an accent."

Taken individually, these comments are viewed by most People of Color as insults. However, many Whites see these statements differently and respond to People of Color with such retorts as "you're being too sensitive about race" or "why does everything have to go back to race." In fact, Charles Lawrence (1987) has commented that through "selective perception, whites are unlikely to hear many of the inadvertent racial slights that are made in their presence" (pp. 340-341). Similarly, Richard Delgado (1988) has stated that "White people rarely see acts of blatant racism, while minority people experience them all the time" (p. 407). In dealing with racial stereotypes in our teacher education classrooms, we need to hear about, discuss, and analyze those racial experiences that People of Color and Whites encounter in their public and private worlds. Not only do we need to discuss the racial macroaggressions such as public or overt racial stereotypes, attitudes, and behaviors, but we also need to listen, understand, and analyze the racial microaggressions, those "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of Blacks by offenders" (Pierce, 1978, p. 66). In fact, Delgado and Jean Stefancic (1992) have described this process as one where:

Racism's victims become sensitized to its subtle nuances and code-words—the body language, averted gazes, exasperated looks, terms such as "you people," "innocent whites," "highly qualified black," "articulate" and so on—that, whether intended or not, convey racially charged meanings. (p. 1283)

One might add other coded language to this list such as "quotas," "preferences," "affirmative action," "reverse discrimination," and "illegal aliens" (Williams, 1991). In our teacher education classrooms, we need to more closely and thoroughly examine the cumulative effect of these macro and microaggressions on both minority and non-minority students and teachers.

Professional Racial Stereotypes and Students of Color

These subtle or private racial stereotypes often take on a different form at the professional level. Indeed, it would be unprofessional for teachers and teacher educators to describe Students of Color as "dumb," "dirty," or "lazy." Instead, some educators and scholars might use a different terminology such as "uneducable," "lack hygiene," or "lack motivation." For example, around the turn of the century, Lewis Terman (1916), the major importer and translator of the Alfred Binet's intelligence test, commented that:

high grade or border-line deficiency...is very, very common among Spanish-Indian and Mexican families of the Southwest and also among negroes. Their dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they

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come.... Children of this group should be segregated into separate classes.... They cannot master abstractions but they can often be made efficient workers.... There is no possibility at the present of convincing society that they should not be allowed to reproduce, although from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding. (pp. 91-92)

In the 1960s, Cecilia Heller (1966), in theorizing why Mexican Americans lack social mobility stated:

The kind of socialization that Mexican American children generally receive at home is not conducive to the development of the capacities needed for advancement in a dynamic industrialized society. This type of upbringing creates stumbling blocks to future advancement by stressing values that hinder mobility—family ties, honor, masculinity, and living in the present—and by neglecting the values that are conducive to it—achievement, independence, and deferred gratification. (p. 34)

In addition, Heller stated that Mexican American “parents, as a whole, neither impose standards of excellence for tasks performed by their children nor do they expect evidence of high achievement” (p. 37).

In the 1980s, Thomas Sowell (1981) claimed that “the goals and values of Mexican Americans have never centered on education” (p. 266) and that many Mexican Americans find the process of education “distasteful” (p. 267). Also, in the 1990s, former United States Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos stated that Latino parents deserve much of the blame for the high dropout rate among their children because:

Hispanics have always valued education...but somewhere along the line we've lost that. I really believe that, today, there is not that emphasis. (Snider, 1990, p. 1).

Moreover, John Ogbu (1990) commented that, “involuntary minorities [Blacks and Chicanos] have not developed a widespread effort optimism or a strong cultural ethic of hard work and perseverance in the pursuit of education” (p. 53). More recently, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton (1993) made the following statement:

Residential segregation has been instrumental in creating a culture of segregation that concentrates poverty to build a set of mutually reinforcing and self-feeding spirals of decline. These include oppositional culture that devalues work, schooling, and marriage, and that stresses attitudes and behavior antithetical and often hostile to success in the larger economy. (p. M3)

Can these comments be interpreted as “professional” ways of stating that Blacks and Latinos are socially and culturally inferior to Whites? Can these racial stereotypes, whether popular or professional illustrations, serve the purpose of rationalizing and keeping minority communities and their students in poor and unequal conditions? Indeed, whether popular or professional, racial stereotyping places the causes for the unequal outcomes on the Students of Color themselves

rather than on society and its institutions.

The theoretical foundation for this line of deficit thinking comes from two traditions: the genetic determinist and cultural deficit models. The genetic determinist model takes the position that the low educational attainment of minority students can be traced to deficiencies in their genetic structure (Jensen, 1969; Kamin, 1974; Terman, 1916). In this scenario, there are few social policy options—lacking genetic transformation or total neglect—to raise the educational attainment of minority students. While seemingly out of favor in educational research and policy circles, there is a resurgence of interest in the genetic determinist model resulting from the works of Lloyd Dunn (1987; see Fernandez 1988), the Minnesota Twin Studies (Bouchard, Lykken, McGue, Segal, & Tellegen, 1990), Frederick Goodwin (see Breggin & Breggin, 1993), and Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1994).

The second and more widely used model in this deficit tradition is the culture deficit model. The cultural deficit model contends that minority cultural values, as transmitted through the family, are dysfunctional, and therefore the reason for low educational and later occupational attainment. The model focuses on such deficient cultural values as present versus future time orientation, immediate instead of deferred gratification, an emphasis on cooperation rather than competition, and placing less value on education and upward mobility (see Carter & Segura, 1979).

The cultural deficit model also examines deficiencies in minority family internal social structure, such as large, disorganized, female-headed families; Spanish or non-standard English spoken in the home; and patriarchal or matriarchal family structures. These models argue that since minority parents fail to assimilate and embrace the educational values of the dominant group, and continue to transmit or socialize their children with values that inhibit educational mobility, then they are to blame if the low educational attainment continues into succeeding generations.

This cultural deficit view of the minority student has become the “norm” in social scientific research, despite the fact there is little empirical evidence to support it (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994; Persell, 1977; Solorzano, 1991, 1992a, 1992b; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995; Valencia, In Press). In practice, the deficit model gets applied in the classroom, and to Students of Color, by teachers who are professionally trained in colleges, and specifically in a teacher education curriculum that reflects an individualistic and cultural deficit explanation of low minority educational attainment (Kretovics & Nussel, 1994; Persell, 1977). The teacher education policy solutions that emerge from this model focus on the acculturation of minority students to the values and behaviors of the culturally dominant group; while criticizing, downplaying, or ignoring the values and behaviors of marginalized minority cultures.

Despite this history, claims that the cultural deficit model has been debunked and no longer widely used seem premature. In fact, the 1980s and 1990s have seen a revival of the cultural deficit model, under the rubric of the cultural “underclass”

(Baca Zinn, 1989; Valencia & Solorzano, In Press). Indeed, Joseph Kretovics and Edward Nussel (1994) have stated: "At the highest levels of educational policy, we have moved from deficiency theory to theories of difference, back to deficiency theory" (p. x). The cultural deficit model, along with related popular and professional racial stereotypes, remains the hidden theory of choice at many elementary and secondary schools, teacher education departments, professional meetings, and settings where the topic of minority educational inequality is discussed.

Conclusion

Critical race theory provides a framework to challenge the genetic and cultural deficit theories. In fact, using the five themes of critical race theory, we can engage in the following four exercises to better understanding and challenge race, racism, and racial stereotypes in our classrooms:

1. Examples of Concepts

We must define, analyze, and give examples for the concepts of race, racism, and racial stereotypes. Engaging in a discussion, analysis, and debate around these concepts is a critical first step. In this exercise, we can examine and give examples of racism in its institutional and individual forms, its macro and micro forms, conscious and unconscious elements, and its cumulative effects on both minority and non-minority students.

2. Identify Media Stereotypes

We must identify racial stereotypes in the popular media such as film, television, and print and show how they are used to justify attitudes and behavior toward Students of Color. For example, we can conduct a comparative analysis of three high school genre films—"Stand and Deliver" (1988), "Lean on Me" (1989), and "Dangerous Minds" (1995)—on the quantity and quality of Black and Latina/o characters. A discussion of these images can lead to the development of alternative story-lines and scripts for the portrayal of Students of Color in film. This same content analysis and alternative portrayals can be performed on television programs and news broadcasts.

Documentary films on the historical and contemporary condition of the Black and Chicano communities can provide an invaluable resource for developing an anti-racist and anti-sexist curriculum. For instance, such Public Broadcasting Service film series as the "Eyes on the Prize I: America's Civil Rights Years" (1986), "Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads" (1990), and "Chicano: History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement" (1996) can serve as an important filmic base to challenge some of the racial and gender stereotypes related to Communities of Color.

3. Identify Professional Stereotypes

We must identify professional stereotypes, show their relationship to popular stereotypes, and then examine how both are used to justify the unequal treatment of Students of Color. For example, using the current state mandated language arts and social science elementary and secondary textbooks, students can conduct a content analysis of the quantity and quality of portrayals of Blacks, Chicanas/os, Native Americans, and Asian Americans (Council on Interracial Books for Children, 1977). As a follow-up, students can use contemporary and historical ethnic studies texts of People of Color to recreate alternative portraits to the state mandated textbooks.

4. Find Examples that Challenge

We must find examples within and about Communities of Color that challenge and transform racial stereotypes. In many Communities of Color, students can find and analyze street murals that artistically portray the positive and negative conditions in these communities. Also, in many of these communities there are elders who keep some of the history and traditions of the community alive. Both street murals and elders can be invaluable resources to dispel the myths of an “uneducated” minority community. Also, information gathered by interviewing day laborers, who congregate in the mornings on certain street corners, can challenge the stereotype of the “lazy” minority worker. Moreover, there are rich sources of material in individual and family oral and pictorial histories, institutional and community studies, and artistic and cultural artifacts and ideologies that would challenge the racial stereotypes found in the popular and professional media.

Racial stereotypes, whether in the popular or professional literature, are continuing to increase. As educators, we must critically analyze their source, rationale, and impact on the people doing the stereotyping and on those being stereotyped. The discussion of race, racism, and racial stereotypes must be a continuing part of our teacher education discourse. In our classrooms, we must seek out popular, professional, and artistic images that depict People of Color in multiple contexts. As educators, we need to identify the resources and strengths of Students of Color and place them at the center of our research, curriculum, and teaching. The five elements of critical race theory provide a framework for teacher education faculty and students to utilize these resources in order to create, recreate, and recover knowledge and art in Communities of Color. In turn, critical race theory can empower teachers and students to better understand and challenge those racial stereotypical portrayals. Critical race theory is about strengths, and strengths are what we should be looking for within the Students and Communities of Color in order to combat and eliminate negative racial stereotypes. Finally, Cornel West (1995) has stated that “Critical Race Theory is the most exciting development in

contemporary legal studies" (p. xi). I would argue that the same can be true for teacher education.

Notes

1. For this essay, People of Color are defined as those persons of African American, Chicana/o, Asian American, and Native American ancestry. I sometimes use this term synonymously with minority. Chicanas and Chicanos are defined as female and male persons of Mexican-origin living in the United States. Latinos are persons of Latin American origin living in the U.S.
2. It is important to note that while critical race theory focuses on the law, we could easily insert other social institutions, such as schools, into these five guiding elements. See Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (1993, 1994) for two comprehensive annotated bibliographies on critical race theory.

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