

# U.C.L.A. Law Review

## Yes, Critical Race Theory Should Be Taught in Your School: Undoing Racism in K–12 Schooling and Classrooms Through CRT

Theresa Montañó & Tricia Gallagher-Geurtsen

### ABSTRACT

Despite panicked calls from the right to keep Critical Race Theory (CRT) out of the K–12 classroom, the authors assert that CRT, one of many theoretical frameworks used in ethnic studies, is needed to address the entrenched status quo of well-documented inequity through racism in schooling. Rather than deny that CRT is being taught in schools, the authors embrace CRT as a tool to disrupt the myth that educational decisions, policies, and practices are based on objectivity or neutrality. First, the authors describe how racism and injustice in schools today directly relate to the historical trajectory of schooling experiences of Indigenous people and people of color in the United States. Next, the authors offer how CRT in K–12 ethnic studies serves to disrupt inequities through antiracist teaching and pedagogy that names oppression, embraces racialized intersectional identities through community cultural wealth, develops counterstories, and engages students in social activism to defy majoritarian supremacy. Last, through examples from K–12 classrooms, the authors show how CRT is indeed taught in schools and to argue that its teaching should become ubiquitous.

### AUTHORS

Theresa Montañó, Ed.D., is a professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) with an emphasis on education. She teaches courses on equity and diversity in schools and the Chicanx child and is an advisor to students enrolled in the master's program. Dr. Montañó has written articles, texts, and a book on issues such as teacher activism, educational injustice, and educating the Latinx and Chicanx student. She previously served for six years as a National Education Association board director, president of the National Council for Higher Education, and California Teachers Association vice president. She has also served as president of educational rights organizations, such as the National Association for Multicultural Education and the California Association of Mexican-American Educators.

Tricia Gallagher-Geurtsen, Ed.D., lectures at the University of California San Diego and UC Santa Cruz. She received her doctoral degree in Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College Columbia University. She is Co-President of the California Chapter of the National Association for Multicultural Education and Co-Chair of San Diego Unified School District's Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee. She began her education through learning from and supporting multilingual communities of color in San Diego, San Jose, New York City, and Utah. Her research and university teaching center decolonizing curriculum and pedagogy.



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## INTRODUCTION

In 2021 the nationwide racial reckoning arrived at our elementary, middle, and high schools. Scenes of school board meetings punctuated with violent denials of racism and white supremacy along with protests against and bans on teaching Critical Race Theory (CRT) became sacrosanct for the right. Filmmaker Christopher Rufo gained national prominence by intentionally stoking fear and then blaming CRT: “The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think of ‘critical race theory,’” he wrote on Twitter. “We have decodified the term and will recodify it to annex the entire range of cultural constructions that are unpopular with Americans.”<sup>1</sup> Uninformed, conservative parents and school board members in California and beyond are often quick to connect the teaching of CRT to the teaching of ethnic studies. For example, in a recent letter to a school board, parents warned about “the danger of Critical Race Theory slipping into our schools through the ETHNIC STUDIES CLASS.”<sup>2</sup> During a school board meeting in Los Alamitos, Harriet Reid, an opponent of a new ethnic studies elective course, argued when after reviewing a slide presentation about the course: “When you read through the slides, you see nothing but critical race theory verbiage.”<sup>3</sup> The same tirade against CRT and ethnic studies has been repeated at school board meetings in cities and towns across California, in Paso Robles,<sup>4</sup> Placentia-Yorba,<sup>5</sup> Salinas,<sup>6</sup> San Diego,<sup>7</sup> Orange County,<sup>8</sup> Palm Springs,<sup>9</sup> Riverside,<sup>10</sup> and

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1. Christopher F. Rufo (@realchrisrufo), TWITTER (Mar. 15, 2021, 12:17 PM), <https://twitter.com/realchrisrufo/status/1371541044592996352> [<https://perma.cc/HR6T-HVYL>].
  2. Email From a Group Opposing the Teaching of Critical Race Theory in Schools to Parents, Grandparents, and Community Members of Los Alamitos School District (n.d.), [https://docs.google.com/document/u/0/d/1eTNNnLUriptjbkad4otJPKOXHbz0GL2imwKLf2l0MOI/mobilebasic?urp=gmail\\_link&gxids=7628](https://docs.google.com/document/u/0/d/1eTNNnLUriptjbkad4otJPKOXHbz0GL2imwKLf2l0MOI/mobilebasic?urp=gmail_link&gxids=7628) [<https://perma.cc/DAA9-G5SY>].
  3. Hayley Smith, *Orange County Debates Ethnic Studies: Vital Learnings or “Anti-White” Divisiveness?*, L.A. TIMES (April 28, 2021, 8:42 AM), <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-04-28/ethnic-studies-slammed-as-anti-white-in-orange-county> (last visited Mar. 20, 2022) (summarizing a Los Alamitos school board meeting).
  4. Camille DeVaul, *PRJUSD Board Vote Down Study Session to Discuss Critical Race Theory*, PASO ROBLES PRESS (July 14, 2021), <https://pasoroblespress.com/news/education/prjUSD-school-board/prjUSD-board-vote-down-study-session-to-discuss-critical-race-theory> [<https://perma.cc/VY9W-FPW5>].
  5. Hosam Elattar, *Orange County Parents and Students Confront Ethnic Studies; School Districts Look to Potentially Expand Offerings*, VOICE OF OC (July 8, 2021), <https://voiceofoc.org/2021/04/orange-county-parents-and-students-confront-ethnic-studies-school-districts-look-to-potentially-expand-offerings> [<https://perma.cc/R37Y-5UM8>].
  6. Melody Waital, *Ethnic Studies Debate Continues in the Salinas Unified High School Board Meeting*, KION 5/46 NEWS (July 14, 2021, 8:58 AM),

Grass Valley<sup>11</sup> to name just a few. In fact, the school board in Paso Robles approved a pilot course in ethnic studies, but according to Superintendent Dubost and Trustee Nathan Williams, CRT would not be part of the course.<sup>12</sup> The attacks on CRT are the latest distractions employed by right wing demagogues in their efforts to derail the movement for ethnic studies. The push to restrict teaching about racism and bias echoes across the nation with at least thirty-six states adopting or introducing such laws or policies.<sup>13</sup>

In truth, the explicit teaching of CRT is rare in K–12 schools, including in ethnic studies classrooms. Beyond the challenge of translating CRT concepts, which have their roots in a complex theory taught in university and law school settings, into language that young people can engage with, it is precisely because CRT “acknowledges the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the imposition of second-class citizenship on Black Americans and other people of color [that] continue to permeate the social fabric of this nation”<sup>14</sup> that most K–12 teachers

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- <https://kion546.com/news/2021/07/13/ethnic-studies-debate-continues-in-the-salinas-unified-high-school-board-meeting> [<https://perma.cc/8N3G-Q5Y8>].
7. Anissa Durham, *San Diego Unified Board Approves Ethnic Studies Funding*, SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIB. (June 22, 2021, 7:38 PM), <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/education/story/2021-06-22/rally-against-critical-race-theory-held-in-opposition-of-board-of-education>.
  8. Elattar, *supra* note 5; Smith, *supra* note 2.
  9. Shad Powers, *Masks, Ethnic Studies Debated at Contentious Desert Sands School Board Meeting*, PALM SPRINGS DESERT SPRING (JULY 21, 2021, 8:26 AM), <https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/education/2021/07/21/masks-ethnic-studies-debated-dsUSD-board-meeting/8027045002> [<https://perma.cc/8DWB-DZUP>].
  10. Breanna Reeves, *RUSD Pushes Back Against Extremists, Affirming Ethnic Studies is Not Critical Race Theory*, BLACK VOICE NEWS (Jan. 12, 2022), <https://blackvoicenews.com/2022/01/12/rusd-pushes-back-against-extremists-affirming-ethnic-studies-is-not-critical-race-theory> [<https://perma.cc/U6HZ-ZM2B>].
  11. *Critical Race Theory in Schools Isn't Indoctrination, It's the Truth*, NEW UNIVERSITY (Jan. 24, 2022), <https://www.newuniversity.org/2022/01/24/critical-race-theory-in-schools-isnt-indoctrination-its-the-truth> [<https://perma.cc/Y9BZ-JPAP>].
  12. DeVaul, *supra* note 4; Karen Garcia, *Paso Unified Approved Its Ethnic Studies Course Offering With More Contingencies*, NEW TIMES (Apr. 15, 2021), <https://www.newtimeslo.com/sanluisobispo/paso-unified-approved-its-ethnic-studies-course-offering-with-more-contingencies/Content?oid=10923656> [<https://perma.cc/6USG-6ZGV>].
  13. Cathryn Stout & Thomas Wilburn, *CRT Map: Efforts to Restrict Teaching Racism and Bias Have Multiplied Across the U.S.*, CHALKBEAT (Feb. 1, 2022, 7:20 PM), <https://www.chalkbeat.org/22525983/map-critical-race-theory-legislation-teaching-racism> [<https://perma.cc/V5WP-R4R5>].
  14. Janel George, *A Lesson on Critical Race Theory*, AM. BAR ASS'N (Jan. 11, 2021), [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human\\_rights\\_magazine\\_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/a-lesson-on-critical-race-theory](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/a-lesson-on-critical-race-theory) (last visited Mar. 21, 2022).

and districts avoid the topic altogether.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, since racism and injustice in schools today are directly related to the historical trajectory of racism and oppression experienced by people of color and Indigenous people in the United States, discussing racial inequity and justice is central to the teaching of ethnic studies at any level. In the school setting, given the long history of persistent school segregation and resegregation,<sup>16</sup> high stakes testing,<sup>17</sup> racial disparities in school discipline<sup>18</sup> and special education practices,<sup>19</sup> and pushout that disproportionately hurts and dehumanizes people of color and Indigenous people,<sup>20</sup> a laser-focus on racism in schools is necessary. Resegregation of Black students across regions and even within schools is well-documented and most pronounced in New York, Illinois, California, and Maryland—states with such extreme segregation they are called “apartheid schools.”<sup>21</sup> Knoester & Au show how high stakes testing is utilized as code to facilitate segregation through racializing decisions and resulting in racist outcomes for children of color. Even within segregated schools, students of color are dehumanized through inequitable discipline policies that result in tremendous lost instructional time for them.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, students of color are disproportionately placed in special education and experience discipline disparities that sustain racialized inequities within special education settings.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the rate at which our nation’s schools push students of color and Indigenous students out of high school is related to less income and poorer health.<sup>24</sup> The legacy of racism in schools, as documented above, demands that

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15. Ileana Najarro, *What Do Teachers Think About Discussing Racism in Class? We Asked Them*, EDUC. WEEK (June 28, 2021), <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-do-teachers-think-about-discussing-racism-in-class-we-asked-them/2021/06> [https://perma.cc/CK6U-4PYK].
  16. GARY ORFIELD & DANIELLE JARVIE, UCLA C.R. PROJECT/PROYECTO DERECHOS CIVILES, *BLACK SEGREGATION MATTERS: SCHOOL RESEGREGATION AND BLACK EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY* (2020).
  17. Matthew Knoester & Wayne Au, *Standardized Testing and School Segregation: Like Tinder for Fire?*, 20 RACE ETHNICITY & EDUC. 1 (2017).
  18. DANIEL J. LOSEN & PAUL MARTINEZ, UCLA C.R. PROJECT/PROYECTO DERECHOS CIVILES, *LOST OPPORTUNITIES: HOW DISPARATE SCHOOL DISCIPLINE CONTINUES TO DRIVE DIFFERENCES IN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN* (2020).
  19. Catherine Kramarczuk Voulgarides, Alexandra Aylward, Adai Tefera, Alfredo J. Artiles, Sarah L. Alvarado & Pedro Noguera, *Unpacking the Logic of Compliance in Special Education: Contextual Influences on Discipline Racial Disparities in Suburban Schools*, 94 *Sociology of Education* 208 (2021).
  20. JOEL MCFARLAND, JIASHAN CUI, JULIET HOLMES & XIAOLEI WANG, NAT’L CTR. FOR EDUC. STAT., *TRENDS IN HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT AND COMPLETION RATES IN THE UNITED STATES: 2019* (2020).
  21. ORFIELD & JARVIE, *supra* note 16.
  22. LOSEN & MARTINEZ, *supra* note 18.
  23. Kramarczuk Voulgarides, Aylward, Tefera, Artiles, Alvarado & Noguera, *supra* note 19.
  24. MCFARLAND, CUI, HOLMES & WANG, *supra* note 20.

K–12 ethnic studies curricula center the experiences of students of color in our past, present, and futures with a particular focus on race and racism:

Attempting to challenge the reproduction of essentialist categories of race, class, and gender, ethnic studies deconstructs structural forms of domination and subordination, going beyond simplistic additives of multicultural content to the curriculum. Ethnic studies is an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and comparative study of the social, cultural, political, and economic expression and experience of ethnic groups. Ethnic studies recovers and reconstructs the counternarratives, perspectives, epistemologies, and cultures of those who have been historically neglected and denied citizenship or full participation within traditional discourse and institutions, particularly highlighting the contributions people of color have made in shaping U.S. culture and society.<sup>25</sup>

CRT is one of many theoretical frameworks commonly found in ethnic studies that is used to fight entrenched racism.<sup>26</sup> Rather than deny CRT is being taught in schools, it is important to point out that teachers do use CRT methods and pedagogy as a tool to disrupt the myth that educational decisions, policies, and practices are based on objectivity or neutrality.<sup>27</sup> We assert that CRT belongs in schools as a tool to identify and dismantle structures, policies, and practices that harm students of color and Indigenous students, their families, their communities, and their futures.

## I. CRT IN K–12 ETHNIC STUDIES

Critical Race Theory (CRT) arose after legal scholars of color questioned why majoritarian legal scholars insisted that legal decisions, policies, and practices were based on objectivity or neutrality.<sup>28</sup> Critical Race scholars maintained that race was and is central to every decision made by those in

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25. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, Rita Kohli, Jocyl Sacramento, Nick Henning, Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath & Christine Sleeter, *Toward an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy: Implications for K–12 Schools From the Research*, 47 URBAN REV. 104 (2014).

26. Cati V. de los Ríos, Jorge López & Ernest Morrell, *Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Race: Ethnic Studies and Literacies of Power in High School Classrooms*, 7 RACE & SOC. PROBS. 84 (2015). See generally RETHINKING ETHNIC STUDIES (R. Tolteka Cuauhtin, Miguel Zavala, Christine Sleeter & Wayne Au eds., 2019); CHRISTINE E. SLEETER & MIGUEL ZAVALA, TRANSFORMATIVE ETHNIC STUDIES IN SCHOOLS: CURRICULUM, PEDAGOGY, AND RESEARCH (2020).

27. RETHINKING ETHNIC STUDIES, *supra* note 26.

28. Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, *Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law*, 101 HARV. L. REV. 1331 (1988).

power. In other words, there is no colorblind decision-making when deciding legal cases, deciding curricular standards, or determining public services.<sup>29</sup> Educational scholars of color were intrigued by the ideas contained in CRT<sup>30</sup> and began to apply it in the field of education to expose the racial inequity in education.

In 2002, Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso identified five main elements of CRT and applied those tenets to the context of education. They asserted that:

CRT in education challenges the traditional claims of the educational system and its institutions toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. The critical race theorist argues that these traditional claims act as camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in societal and individual transformation.<sup>31</sup>

Ethnic studies educators utilize the five elements identified by Solórzano and Yosso: the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination; the challenge to dominant ideology; the commitment to social justice; the centrality of experiential knowledge; and the transdisciplinary perspective.<sup>32</sup> In particular, ethnic studies educators aim to disrupt the stereotypical and pervasive falsehoods evident in the K–12 curriculum—most easily identified in history and social science content. Using the disciplines of history, English, mathematics, science, and world languages, as well as visual and performing arts, ethnic studies essentially deconstructs the dominant narrative and reconstructs it to embrace the experiential knowledge and intersectional identities of racialized and marginalized communities as the alternative to an outdated, racist and narrow definition of United States history, for example. The Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium explains the difference in approach:

For example, in a [typical] United States History course one might incorporate a lesson on the construction of the intercontinental railroad mentioning the contributions of the Chinese railroad workers.

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29. *Id.*

30. Gloria Ladson-Billings, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, 32 AM. EDUC. RSCH. J. 465 (1995); Daniel G. Solórzano & Tara J. Yosso, *Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research*, 8 QUALITATIVE INQUIRY 23 (2002); Beverly Daniel Tatum, *WHY ARE ALL THE BLACK KIDS SITTING TOGETHER IN THE CAFETERIA?* (1997); see also Gloria Ladson-Billings, *Just What Is Critical Race Theory and What's It Doing in a Nice Field Like Education?* 11 INT'L J. QUALITATIVE STUD. EDUC. 7 (1998).

31. See Daniel G. Solórzano & Tara J. Yosso, *Critical Race and LatCrit Theory and Method: Counter-Storytelling*, 14 INT'L J. QUALITATIVE STUD. EDUC. 471, 471–72.

32. Solórzano & Yosso, *supra* note 30; RETHINKING ETHNIC STUDIES, *supra* note 26; SLEETER, & ZAVALA, *supra* note 26.

In contrast, an ethnic studies or Asian American Studies course would examine the patterns of immigration law, economic exploitation, racism, and colonialism from the perspective of Asian Americans.<sup>33</sup>

By asking students to consider the impact of systems that sustain racist policies and practices while claiming neutrality on Asian Americans, students can challenge the ideologies and engage in social justice activities to undo those racist structures.

Likewise, as oppositional disciplines, it often takes social movements to institutionalize the counter narratives of these communities and to ensure their implementation, as we saw in the student challenges to the state of Arizona’s banning of the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson Unified School District.<sup>34</sup> The struggle for K–12 ethnic studies is evidenced in the current struggle to secure a liberatory ethnic studies graduation requirement in California.<sup>35</sup> For these reasons without explicitly naming CRT, ethnic studies educators apply the tenets of CRT as they write lesson plans, develop curricula and instruct their students. The development of CRT as a structure of K–12 ethnic studies curricula opens the door to liberation from racism for our students. Therefore, it is central that CRT in education argues that a students’ every day experience is informed by their encounters with racism.

## II. NAMING OPPRESSION AND EMBRACING INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

When applied to the interdisciplinary field of ethnic studies, Critical Race Theory (CRT) argues that race and racism are a part of everyday life for communities of color where ordinary experiences are informed by their encounters with racism—individual, interpersonal, institutional, and ideological. In order to disrupt oppression, the ethnic studies teacher must help students identify and name it. For example, a lesson wherein students learn about the aforementioned “four I’s of oppression”<sup>36</sup> and then identify which type of oppression is displayed in primary and secondary sources gives students the practice needed to name oppression of racialized groups. An example of this in practice is engaging students in analysis of a music video clip “*Ice El Hielo*” by

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33. Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium, *Introduction to Chapter 1*, in *THE LIBERATED ETHNIC STUDIES MODEL CURRICULUM* 4 (2021).

34. Julio Cammarota, *The Praxis of Ethnic Studies: Transforming Second Sight into Critical Consciousness*, 19 *RACE ETHNICITY AND EDUCATION* 233 (2016).

35. John Fensterwald, *California Becomes First State to Require Ethnic Studies in High School*, *EDSOURCE* (Oct. 8, 2021), <https://edsources.org/2021/california-becomes-first-state-to-require-ethnic-studies-in-high-school/662219> [<https://perma.cc/9LLT-FEN7>].

36. John Bell, *The Four “I’s” of Oppression*, *BEGIN WITHIN BLOG*, <https://beginwithin.info/articles-2> (follow hyperlink; scroll to “Diversity, Oppression, and Liberation” heading and select *The Four I’s of Oppression*).



La Santa Cecilia,<sup>37</sup> a bar graph of police killings by race over time, a clip from the documentary *No Más Bebés*,<sup>38</sup> and a Chinese laundry advertisement. Students are asked to identify which types of oppression—individual, interpersonal, institutional, or ideological are exemplified in each artifact. For example, the practice of sterilizing Latinx women post-childbirth in a Los Angeles hospital without their knowledge or consent in an example of both institutional and individual oppression. Through naming oppression, students in ethnic studies classrooms then gain the critical consciousness needed to change those oppressive structures.

A teacher using a CRT lens would reason that changing racist educational structures requires students to embrace their racialized identity and its intersections with gender, religion, sexual orientation, languages, immigration status, ability, and other traits.<sup>39</sup> Using a CRT lens in ethnic studies recognizes the critical role that race plays in the educational experiences of students of color, while maintaining that historical and contemporary experiences are also influenced by other intersectionalities such as gender and class and that those intersectionalities can further marginalization and inequity.<sup>40</sup> For example, being a Black, migrant, cis-gendered woman will yield a different experience than being a Pinoy trans multilingual man. In addition, the explicit commitment to social justice in CRT compels student engagement in systemic change and requires students to embrace their racialized identity and their intersectional positionality. As Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales explains:

To get rid of racism, to get rid of Anti-Asian, Anti-Black, Anti-Brown, Anti-Arab, Anti-Indigenous violence we must teach about the historical and contemporary racial injustice that our communities have experienced and fought against. Ethnic Studies has been at the forefront of ensuring that the stories, struggles, survival, social movements, and solidarity of people of color are being taught. To be

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37. La Santa Cecilia, *La Santa Cecilia: Ice El Hielo*, YouTube (Apr. 8, 2013), <https://youtu.be/0lNJviuYUEQ> [https://perma.cc/R523-HQCR].

38. NO MÁS BEBÉS (PBS 2015).

39. Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, 43 STAN. L. REV. 1241 (1991).

40. Daniel G. Solórzano & Dolores Delgado Bernal, *Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and LatCrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context*, 36 URB. EDUC. 308 (2001); R. Tolteka Cuauhtin, *The Matrix of Social Identity and Intersectional Power*, in RETHINKING ETHNIC STUDIES, *supra* note 26, at 38–47.

honest Ethnic Studies saved my own life and is the only place in education where I felt true belonging.<sup>41</sup>

It is through knowledge of self and one's communities by centering experiences of people of color and Indigenous people, resilience, and resistance in the K–12 ethnic studies classroom, that intersectional antiracism and decolonization can take place. Indeed, a facet of CRT utilized in ethnic studies is the idea that from the ashes of oppression and marginalization faced by communities of color comes the beauty and richness of the cultural knowledge, stories of resistance, literary writings, songs and music, and linguistic diversity used to express the humanism, collectivism, healing, and community intrinsic in communities of color.<sup>42</sup> Ethnic studies operationalizes students' experiences and knowledge through Yosso's "community cultural wealth."<sup>43</sup>

### III. HOW COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH AND COUNTERSTORIES ARE REFLECTED IN ETHNIC STUDIES

Ethnic studies also embraces Yosso's CRT challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural capital,<sup>44</sup> known as community cultural wealth. In an assets-based approach, Yosso identifies forms of capital that are typically made invisible for marginalized students by schooling and that are centered in K–12 ethnic studies: aspirational capital (holding dreams in the face of barriers); navigational capital (the ability to move through institutions); social capital (networks of people); linguistic capital (the intellectual and social skills achieved through facility in more than one language); familial capital (the sense of community history, memory, cultural intuition); and resistant capital (knowledges and skills fostered through opposition behaviors that challenge inequality). Students can embrace their racialized identity and their intersectional positionality by highlighting their community cultural wealth, such as intellectual traditions and ancestral knowledge. What this looks like in one classroom in Los Angeles, is two teachers creating a schoolwide production called

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41. Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium, *LESMC Institute: Demystifying Critical Race Theory, Expert Panel Presentation*, YOUTUBE (Nov. 20, 2021), <https://youtu.be/IeZodCmKNY4> [<https://perma.cc/KA54-Y6AZ>].

42. Solórzano & Yosso, *supra* note 30; R. Tolteka Cuauhtin, *We Have Community Cultural Wealth: Scaffolding Tara Yosso's Theory for Classroom Praxis*, in *RETHINKING ETHNIC STUDIES*, *supra* note 26, at 244–46.

43. Tara J. Yosso, *Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth*, 8 *RACE ETHNICITY & EDUC.* 69 (2005).

44. *Id.*

*Canción del Inmigrante* (Song of the Immigrant),<sup>45</sup> where students constructed a community counternarrative using puppetry, poetry, and plays to portray the way that Latinx immigrant communities survive racist immigration policies that often result in deportations, familial trauma, and family separation.

Ethnic studies courses center on the lived experiences of people of color and Indigenous people told as counternarratives that defy majoritarian supremacy.<sup>46</sup> In K–12, ethnic studies teachers use CRT methods and pedagogy to address the educational and social experiences of racialized communities as influenced by multiple forces including racial trauma, phenotypical stereotyping, cultural devaluation or appropriation, legal discrimination, and historical amnesia. Recognition of racialized trauma in the K–12 ethnic studies classroom doesn't mean that people of color or Indigenous people are deficient, defective, or lesser than—on the contrary, they are resilient people. Ethnic studies educators take care to point out that in response to the devaluing of a people, ancestors have passed on their counternarratives, their community cultural wealth, their intellectual traditions, and their ancestral knowledge. Ethnic studies is the vehicle used to share the healing and connecting beauty of culture, art, traditions, and knowledge.<sup>47</sup>

In K–12, students reflect, name, discuss and address the trauma of their encounters with racism, past and present. For example, while studying the San Patricio Battalion<sup>48</sup> and contemporary solidarity movements, students may engage in an activity wherein they identify examples of colonialism, examine the similarities between Irish and Mexican experiences, and hypothesize why the Irish chose to fight alongside the Mexicans during the Mexican-American War. They may investigate and research other historical examples and observe and engage in analyzing the face of oppression as either self-defeating, reactionary, conformist, or transformative while discussing how people who have been colonized respond to imperialism. They may also decide to consider other contemporary areas of solidarity, nationally or globally.

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45. *Canción del Inmigrante* is a production of the One Grain of Sand Puppet Theatre and Los Angeles-based Latin folk band Cuñao. See ONE GRAIN OF SAND PUPPET THEATRE, <https://artisvida.wixsite.com/bethpeterson> [https://perma.cc/4FPQ-6XFY]; CUÑAO MUSIC, <https://cunaomusic.com> (last visited Mar. 20, 2022).

46. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales, Rita Kohli, Jocyl Sacramento, Nick Henning, Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath & Christine Sleeter, *What is Ethnic Studies Pedagogy?*, in *RETHINKING ETHNIC STUDIES*, *supra* note 26, at 20–25.

47. See generally *RETHINKING ETHNIC STUDIES*, *supra* note 26.

48. Abby Bender, *Irish-Mexican Solidarity and the San Patricio Battalion Flag*, 36 *GENRE* 271 (2003).

## A. Social Activism

Ethnic studies embeds community responsive practices such as youth participatory action research,<sup>49</sup> civic engagement, direct involvement in social movements or critical community projects as a means to creating a better, more equitable society. These critical participatory projects connect directly to the idea of working for social justice, a component of CRT.<sup>50</sup> Student involvement in social movements, civic engagement and other community responsive projects are necessary in ethnic studies, a field where social engagement is often considered the radical hope of ethnic studies.<sup>51</sup>

## IV. CRT IN THE ETHNIC STUDIES CLASSROOM

We assert that using CRT in K–12 ethnic studies classrooms is the foundation for antiracist pedagogy and methodology. A quick look at the seven principles of ethnic studies, demonstrates why CRT is one of the many theoretical frameworks that complement ethnic studies.<sup>52</sup>

1. *Cultivate* empathy, community actualization, cultural perpetuity, self-worth, self-determination, and the holistic well-being of all participants, especially people of color and Indigenous people;
2. *Celebrate* and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of color by providing a space to share their stories of struggle and resistance, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth;
3. *Center* and place high value on pre-colonial, ancestral, indigenous, diasporic, familial, and marginalized knowledge;
4. *Critique* empire, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, racism, patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism,

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49. REVOLUTIONIZING EDUCATION: YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN MOTION (Julio Cammarota & Michelle Fine eds., 2008).

50. Solórzano & Yosso, *supra* note 30; Rita Kohli, *Critical Race Reflections: Valuing the Experiences of Teachers of Color in Teacher Education*, 12 RACE ETHNICITY & EDUC., 235–51 (2009).

51. Jeffrey M.R. Duncan-Andrade, *Note to Educators: Hope Required When Growing Roses in Concrete*, 79 HARV. EDUC. REV. 181 (2009).

52. See, e.g., Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales & Edward Curammeng, *Pedagogies of Resistance: Filipina/o “Gestures of Rebellion” Against the Inheritance of American Schooling*, in EDUCATION AT WAR: THE FIGHT FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR IN AMERICA’S PUBLIC SCHOOLS 233–38 (Arshad Imtiaz Ali & Tracy Lachica Buenavista eds., 2018); R. Tolteka Cuauhtin, *The Ethnic Studies Framework, A Holistic Overview* in RETHINKING ETHNIC STUDIES, *supra* note 26, at 65–75; LIBERATED ETHNIC STUDIES MODEL CURRICULUM COALITION, THE GUIDING VALUES, PRINCIPLES, AND OUTCOMES OF ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHING (2019) <http://www.liberatedethnicstudies.org/principles.html> [<https://perma.cc/75MQ-KNU9>] (follow “Core values and principles of Ethnic Studies” hyperlink); Yosso, *supra* note 43.

anthropocentrism, and other forms of power at the intersections of our society;

5. *Challenge* imperialist and colonial hegemonic beliefs and practices on ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized levels;

6. *Connect* ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for social justice on global and local levels to ensure a truer democracy;

7. *Conceptualize*, imagine, and build new possibilities for post-imperial life that promote collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing.

Ethnic Studies educators may connect curricular objectives that reflect CRT methodology and apply the following learning strategies:

1. Students consider the historical trajectory experienced by people of color and Indigenous people, as they consider issues of racism and injustice today;
2. Students reflect, name, discuss, and address the trauma of their encounters with racism;
3. Students embrace their racialized identity and their intersectional positionality, their community cultural wealth, their intellectual traditions and ancestral knowledge;
4. Students engage in social justice projects that benefit all of society;
5. Since ethnic studies is an antiracist project, students are encouraged to develop counter-stories or counter-narratives to the dominant voices in traditional curriculum.<sup>53</sup>

Through ethnic studies courses that utilize these objectives to guide student learning, CRT educated teachers can equip students to transform structural racism into a system based on equity, inclusion, and democracy. Through lessons, student experiences of oppression would be named in order for students to understand how their experiences are not anomalies, but directly related to the historical trajectory and social conditions facing communities of color and Indigenous people in the United States.

Once student critical consciousness<sup>54</sup> is developed, students engage in social justice projects that benefit all of society. For example, at one Southern California high school, teachers ask students to brainstorm issues of injustice in their communities. These students situated in a predominately Asian American and

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53. Theresa Montaño, Adm'r Institute Ass'n Cal. Sch. Adm'rs, Region 6 Conf., Implementing Ethnic Studies Through a Critical Consciousness, (Oct. 20, 2021).

54. PAULO FREIRE, EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS (1974).

Latinx community have identified how racism impacts the lives of undocumented students in their communities. The civic engagement projects in this district have ranged from establishing a dream center at the local high school to proposing a legislative proposal presented to the local school board and city council.<sup>55</sup> Other ethnic studies educators have concentrated on the school-to-prison pipeline, voter registration, planting gardens in the community for environmental justice, and more.<sup>56</sup> The idea of moving students from naming and analyzing injustice to actually engaging in constructing a better world is a central element of CRT.<sup>57</sup>

In order for students to engage in social justice actions they develop counterstories to the stories told about people of color and Indigenous people. Since ethnic studies is an antiracist project, students are also encouraged to develop counterstories or counternarratives to the dominant voices in the traditional curriculum. The development of the counterstory is an indispensable element of critical race methodology in that it becomes a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege and can be used to shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform.<sup>58</sup> At one Northern California high school, a teacher applied the concept of community cultural wealth to an ethnic studies unit using Tupac Shakur's *The Rose That Grew from Concrete*.<sup>59</sup> Students were asked to analyze the poem, listen to a short lecture on self-actualization, and consider how the elements of community cultural capital disrupt deficit models and internalized oppression in our school communities. Students then learned that deficit thinking blames poor and marginalized parents and families for the educational opportunity gap that labels their children as underachieving.<sup>60</sup> Students were asked to name the community cultural capital in their lives and demonstrate how the examples identified by students deconstruct this thinking. Finally, students turned the

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55. Interview with Tammy Scordia, Alhambra Tchrs. Ass'n President (Nov. 17, 2020).

56. E-mail from Lupe Carrasco Cardona, Ethnic Studies Educator and English Language Development Coordinator, Los Angeles Unified School District, to author (Jan. 11, 2022).

57. Cati V. de los Ríos, *Revisiting Notions of Social Action in Ethnic Studies Pedagogy: One Teacher's Critical Lessons From the Classroom*, in *RETHINKING ETHNIC STUDIES*, *supra* note 26, at 59–64; Solórzano & Yosso, *supra* note 30.

58. See Solórzano & Yosso, *supra* note 31.

59. Jeffrey Ramirez, *How Do We Grow More Roses?: Identifying and Utilizing Cultural Capital in Our Lives and Communities*, Presentation at the Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium Ethnic Studies Demystifying Critical Race Theory Seminar, at 1:54:08 (Nov. 20, 2021), <https://youtu.be/IeZodCmKNY4> [<https://perma.cc/UE9H-ECR2>]; see also TUPACSHAKUR, *THE ROSE THAT GREW FROM CONCRETE* (1999).

60. Gloria Ladson-Billings, *From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools*, 35 *EDUC. RESEARCHER*, 3 (2006).

concepts into beautiful artwork and murals. In this instance, the murals were counter-stories that challenge deficit views of students of color.

Antiracist pedagogy that names racism and oppression, although not widespread, is nothing new in schooling.<sup>61</sup> However, ethnic studies is explicitly antiracist and centers the experiences of the four core groups of ethnic studies (Indigenous/Native American, Black, Chicanx/Latinx, and Asian American/Pacific Islander/Arab American) from their self-determined perspectives. Further, CRT in ethnic studies is not satisfied with naming racism; it is imperative that K–12 students take action based on their critical consciousness of racial injustice. Not only is CRT being taught in ethnic studies classrooms, but we need all classrooms to explicitly challenge the endemic racism in our schools in society that serves to dehumanize students of color. We believe that if you are against CRT in schools, you are for racism in schools.

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61. Amy Stuart Wells & Diana Cordova-Cobo, *The Post-Pandemic Pathway to Anti-Racist Education: Building a Coalition Across Progressive, Multicultural, Culturally Responsive, and Ethnic Studies Advocates*, CENTURY FOUND. (May 24, 2021), <https://tcf.org/content/report/post-pandemic-pathway-anti-racist-education-building-coalition-across-progressive-multicultural-culturally-responsive-ethnic-studies-advocates/?session=1> [<https://perma.cc/4TPH-HTPW>].