

### **Why The Demand for Critical Race Theory is a Demand for Truth**

“Stop brainwashing innocent children. I would pull my kids out of the schools if this is crammed down their throats.”

“Our students are already being indoctrinated by some very left leaning, progressive socialist instructors at the high school level. Parents need to take an active interest in the High School curriculum to ensure that it reflects firm traditional American values”

“Critical Race Theory IS racism!”

These are the comments that appear under a Facebook post by the Paso Robles Daily News after they announced that the Paso Robles High school board was discussing the inclusion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in their curriculum. CRT is a study dedicated to exploring structural and systemic racism’s impact on the formation and development of America. By including the perspective and lived experience of marginalized groups it stands as a supplement to the histories of this nation that are currently told. The local, fervent conversation that occurred in Paso Robles has been reflected hundreds of times throughout the entire United States as governments consider the role of education in combating racism and critics launch assaults at those governments already on their way to implementing it. This discussion should not be a controversial one, and I am here to argue that the inclusion of CRT in public school systems is not a new, unreasonable demand but rather the necessary response to decades of neglect.

Having CRT taught throughout the public school system is the grandest gesture of accepting responsibility that America can make. The diversion of funds, allotment of school hours, and requirement of CRT for graduation are all gestures that work to redress the contribution of U.S institutions to the violence experienced by marginalized groups. This curriculum provides America the necessary steps to move forward, as CRT first demands acknowledgement (a step that has still not been fully reached) in order to then ask for the necessary forgiveness.

Critics who argue CRT has no place in K-12, but is rather a theoretical framework deserving of higher education settings, neglect to acknowledge that K-12 is the only guaranteed, subsidized education that exists. Democracies function when citizens are informed and this happens in public education, where knowledge is democratized. This is the very reason universal public education was created, with the sole intention of developing citizens and thus strengthening the nation-state. Those who argue CRT is a form of indoctrination, forget that public education at its core is indoctrination. It is, in its very essence, a project of constructing the American spirit and our common identity, by means of uniting us in our collective history. The inclusion of CRT means that tolerance, the fight against injustice, and the centering of marginalized individuals is part of the American agenda and an expectation of what democracy should produce.

The ideas of systemic racism *must* be taught in a formal education setting, especially as education is one of the very systems that has historically perpetuated racism. Educators are state-sanctioned authority figures for children that are the most influential individuals beyond those that exist within the home. The inclusion of these topics within the education system legitimates the beliefs it argues for as truth.

A common argument expressed by political pundits and parents alike is that CRT will actually *teach* racism. However, children are asked to live in and navigate a world that teaches this already. Education cannot be an insular experience within the classroom, as the knowledge learned in school is further understood, applied, and built upon in the “real” world. Students cannot experience contradicting realities. The refusal to teach about racism in school does not combat the existence of racism but rather leaves students unequipped for when they undoubtedly encounter racism in the real world.

One of the fundamental issues of addressing racism on an interpersonal level, and then on a larger scale, is the lack of language given to individuals, especially white people, to discuss racism. Education can and should be responsible for providing these tools, in the same way it provides tools to solve problems in Math class. A formal educational setting provides peers an opportunity to discuss complex, sensitive topics under the moderation of an educator and with the assurance that mistakes will understandably be made in this process of learning. It also ingrains for students that the process of unlearning and challenging the racism embedded in our society is a *discipline* deserving of continuous attention and labor.

Courses focused specifically on the experiences of minorities in America are necessary for supplementing the identity formation that occurs in K-12 education. These curriculums provide opportunities for marginalized groups to learn their histories and how to conceptualize why their lived experiences or situations may be influenced by factors outside of their control and may look different than their white peers. It allows for opportunities to discover pride by situating themselves within their own cultural heritages and by being exposed to representation of their ethnic-racial group in American history. It equalizes their ancestors’ legacy with that of white students, whose narrative is dominant in our current instruction of history.

The benefits of discussions about race in school, facilitated by CRT or Ethnic Studies curriculums, have also been quantitatively and scientifically measured by numerous studies. According to a study conducted in 2017 by the Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis, the existence of an ethnic studies course developed in San Francisco school districts increased participants’ attendance, course completion rates, and grades. In Tucson, students who took Mexican American studies were more likely to pass state exams and graduate high school. Additional case studies in Oakland, showed that the offering of classes on Black history and culture reduced dropout rates of Black boys by over half. Most significantly, students from numerous schools in L.A, when taught history lessons focusing on Black and Hispanic contributions to American history, were left feeling a greater desire to engage politically, whether in the form of voting or protesting.

Critical Race Theory deserves to be taught in public school curriculums because it is accurate history. It provides an evolution in education, which we have already accepted in the

American commitment to “educational reform.” CRT does not teach children to be racist, but rather is the true safeguard against the very socialization that has created our racist society.