Chapter 2

Conservative Discourses on Critical Race Theory:
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Editorials in the New York Post

Kathy-Anne Jordan
Mercy College, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter employs critical discourse analysis to analyze the discursive representation of critical race theory across several editorials within the New York Post. The goal was to understand the discourses that inform a conservative stance on critical race theory, the ideological assumptions that undergird them, and the ways in which they contribute to sustaining existing power relations. Findings revealed that the Conservative Right sought a rebranding of critical race theory through an oppositional discourse of the theory as indoctrination, anti-American, divisive, poisonous, and abusive, among other things. This discourse was aimed at mobilizing Americans to wage war against critical race theory, which was textually represented as a threat to "American culture" and "American ideals." Discourses of colorblindness and postracialism further reinscribed conservative notions that minimize the role of racism in society and in the everyday experiences of racially and ethnically diverse individuals.

INTRODUCTION

What people look like, or, rather, the race they have been assigned or are perceived to belong to, is the visible cue to their caste. It is the historic flash card to the public of how they are to be treated, where they are expected to live, what kinds of positions they are expected to hold, whether they belong in this section of town or that seat in a boardroom, whether they should be expected to speak with authority on this or that subject, whether they will be administered pain relief in a hospital, whether their neighborhood is likely to adjoin a toxic waste site or to have contaminated water flowing from their taps, whether they are more or less likely to survive childbirth in the most advanced nation in the world, whether they may be shot by authorities with impunity.

– Isabel Wilkerson, Caste: The Origins of our Discontents

The above quote by Isabel Wilkerson speaks to the enduring significance of race and racism and the resulting experiences that characterize the lives of many racially and ethnically diverse people in the United Sates. The recent and much publicized murder of George Floyd, a Black man, by a White police officer, sparked national outrage at the seemingly endless and senseless chain of murders of Black men and women perpetrated by White police officers. Not surprisingly, national and international protests ensued, *Black Lives Matter* became a constant feature in the American media, and Americans were once again forced to publicly confront and wrestle with the deeply emotional, unsettling, and ugly realities of race in America, including the contentious issue of how to address the current racial climate and topic of race in schools.

Critical race theory (CRT), a movement concerned with "studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3), dominated the news media in the weeks and months following Floyd's murder and is still being hotly debated more than a year later. Critical race theory originated in the legal field and teaches that racism is normal in society and deeply embedded within its structure and institutions. Moreover, since racism advances the interests of White people, there is little incentive to acknowledge and eradicate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Applied to the field of education, CRT provides a framework for examining inequitable policies and practices, including curriculum development, assessment, instruction, school funding, and desegregation (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Some researchers have applied CRT's principles to new theories (e.g., disability critical race theory [DisCrit]) to understand the institutional mechanisms that support overidentification of racial and ethnic minorities as "disabled," and their subsequent

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