

What the ATA doesn't want you to know about critical race theory

By John Hilton O'Brien, 19 December 2022

Critical Race Theory. Alberta parents hear about it in classrooms. We hear about its Marxist roots. It argues that there are only “oppressors,” and “oppressed” who are never to blame for their own failures. In Alberta, we want our kids to take responsibility for themselves — we would never teach them this. So where does it come from — and why does the Alberta Teachers' Association seem so incredibly set on teaching it to our kids?

The answer is in two words: Interest Convergence, the interests of a class of professional elites and a marginalized group.

To 60's and 70's civil rights experts, it explained why school desegregation seemed to be failing. [Derrick Bell](#) theorized that civil rights reforms only happened when the interests of a marginalized group temporarily converged with the interests of the powerful. Reforms such as desegregation only succeeded because they advanced American diplomacy in the Cold War.

Social programs in general didn't seem as helpful as promised. Organizer [Saul Alinsky](#) pointed out that elites gained power and money by exploiting the image of the poor and vulnerable. Careers were made, bureaucratic empires founded. Alinsky called the effect “political pornography.”

These were tough-minded analyses, and probably right.

CRT was the solution advanced by the activists. Marxism claimed America had a dominant narrative justifying the power of the elites — a “hegemony.” You can't challenge it on its own terms

because you cannot challenge its basic premises. To get past it, you had to listen to the “[standpoint](#)” of oppressed groups. Then, “[Repressive Tolerance](#)” would let us privilege those standpoints, by shutting down mainstream voices. In a search for social justice, CRT ignores all voices but its own.

But who is oppressed? What standpoints should be privileged or suppressed? Who makes these decisions — with what bias?

These are urgent questions because repressive tolerance is now real. A social media company such as Twitter can all but erase dissenting views. Those who contradict prescribed wisdom can be accused of hate speech — even jailed for refusing to call their own children by their “preferred pronouns.” The privileged view becomes the only view — which means elites can create their own hegemony at will.

Increasingly authoritarian measures aren't helping marginalized people, despite billions spent. Public schools [still tend to be segregated](#) because of socio-economic factors. Canadian schools on First Nations reserves are (by definition) segregated. A quarter of prison inmates are native — though natives are only three to six percent of the population. Even in Alberta, marginalized [people suffer more than ever](#). And there are new oppressions — media suggestions of a mass grave on a residential school site provoked the [burning of 68 churches](#) across the country, without effective official response.

Like in Bell's time, elite interests no longer converge with those of marginalized people. Critical Race Theory now benefits only the elites — and only transiently benefits marginalized people.

Here's how it works:

CRT transfers authority from parents to professionals. Most Alberta school [board policies](#) prohibit staff from notifying parents that their children participate in religious or sexual clubs or activities, regardless of circumstances. Activist teachers can indoctrinate children with gender or religious ideology — without ever telling parents. The Alberta Teachers' Association claims teachers now act in [parens patriae](#), like social workers seizing children from abusers. In the ATA's world, teachers aren't just co-parents: They've replaced the parents.

Critical Theory provides opportunities for the professional class. CRT seminars dominate teachers' conventions and other training. Practical updates to teaching methods and content areas are limited. Academics are hired specifically from members of oppressed groups. Government grants are available for “anti-racism” programs. “Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity” (DIE) departments and consultants have exploded.

Alinsky's criticism is spot on. We are in the same position Bell found in the early 70's: Our activists are explained by interest convergence. The bureaucrat, the professor and the teacher's union board are privileged elites: They have all the power in the

relation to parents. When they take power away from parents in the name of oppressed groups, it is exploitation. Political pornography, in Alinsky's terms.

Bell's diagnosis was right, but the prescription was wrong. How do we fix it?

First, end instruction on Critical Race Theory and Gender Theory at teachers' conferences. Help teachers learn to teach more effectively. They don't need another seminar on "allyship." They are already allies of those who are marginalized.

Second, let DIE, die. Teachers don't need bureaucrats to lecture them about "inclusion." That money would buy a lot of inexpensive assistants and other supports. The same is true of politicians and corporations: If their responsibility is only to their supporters or shareholders, then DIE is window-dressing. Responsible organizations don't need consultants to spin their actions.

Finally, use better ideas. While Bell was analyzing, Wolf Wolfensberger created [Social Role Valorization](#). It's helped marginalized people for decades — and it doesn't take power away from

anyone. HR departments, social workers, and teachers can easily learn it. Its unassuming training system has been in place for generations, and needs no bureaucratic empire.

Let's do what actually works for marginalized people — not elites — and put a stop to political pornography.

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