

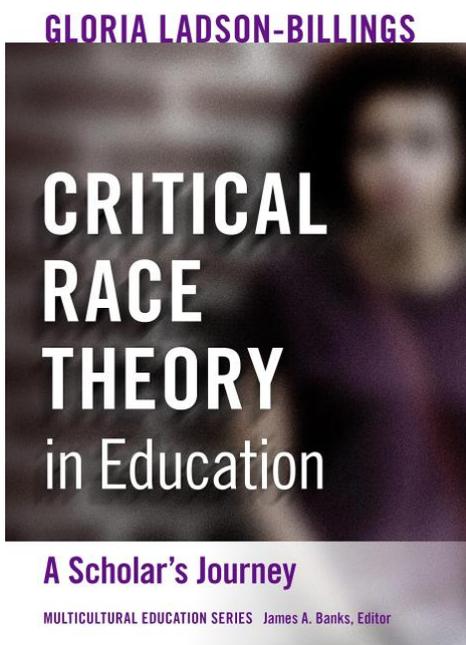
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Review of Critical race theory in education: A scholar's journey

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Overview

We all evolve in our knowledge and professional works. This book highlights the journey of Gloria Ladson-Billings, one of the pioneers of Critical Race Theory (CRT) through a collection of her previously published articles. Ladson-Billings (2021) defines CRT using Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) five tenets: "...belief that racism is normal or ordinary, not aberrant, in US society; interest convergence or material determinism; race as a social construction; intersectionality and anti-essentialism; voice or counter-narrative" (p. 42). She has learned from scholars in many disciplines, such as economics, about social inequities and social injustices and brought those ideologies to the realm of education. Part I of this book gives an overview of CRT, both what it is and what it is not. Part II of this book discusses many of the inequity issues, both throughout the history of the U.S. and in our current context. She gives a comprehensive look at inequity both in society and in our educational system. Part III of this book details the epistemologies and methodologies that scholars can employ to combat racism and how CRT is at the heart of these paradigms. I have organized this review by each part in the book and further divided the review into the chapters from each part.

Part I: Critical Race Theory

Chapter 1

Ladson-Billings begins to explain her journey with her seminal piece published with her colleague, William F. Tate IV (1995), "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education." In this article, she outlines how she came to CRT scholarship, what it is, and how it can operate within education in the U.S. Ladson-Billings uses this article to point to the places where race is built into the fabric of our society and the systems that run our country. This

idea that racism is engrained into our society agrees with Sensory and DiAngelo (2017), who state, "Oppression is a multidimensional imbalance of social, political, and instructional power that builds over time and then becomes normal and acceptable to most people in the society" (p. 67). Ladson-Billings (2021) discusses inequity today, through three propositions: "1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States. 2. U.S. society is based on property rights. 3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity" (p. 18).

Ladson-Billings discusses how race is relevant in the inequity in our society and needs to be examined at the systemic level. She highlights the fact that property and land ownership are central to oppression. This idea intersects with Indigenous theories. As Pihama and Lee-Morgan (2019) stated, "Colonial schooling is also seen as a vehicle through which to support the dispossession of Indigenous Nations from our lands" (p. 20). Colonizers have always sought to own land and peoples to advance their own interests. This is still relevant today in the school systems. Ladson-Billings looks at the disparities in the course offerings of a school between an upper-middle class White community and an urban, largely African American school district. The White students have many more choices and facilities, thus 'owning' more academic choices than do the African American students. She then elaborates even more on how these ideologies impact the education of students of Color, pointing out where the Civil Rights movement ended up the replicating systems of oppression it intended to dismantle.

Chapter 2

After her first article came out, Ladson-Billings found that many scholars were writing more about personal racial injustices. In this chapter, Ladson-Billings chose to use her article “Critical Race Theory – What It Is Not!” (2013) to, “...return the focus back to the power of CRT as a theory that carefully and systematically could examine race and racism” (p. 11). She explains that just because a scholar studies or writes about race, that does not necessarily make them a CRT scholar. To discuss what CRT is, Ladson-Billings relies on Delgado and Stefancic’s (2001) tenets of CRT. She describes how she interprets each of the tenets of CRT and uses helpful anecdotes to illustrate her point. She elaborates on the fact that racism is normal in U.S. society as well as the fact that this will not change without interest convergence on the part of dominant, White society. Ladson-Billings discusses how race is a social construct, as many scientists agree that race is not a scientific reality. She discusses how this was apparent in Obama’s presidential race, when he was neither ‘Black enough’ nor ‘White enough’ for many voters. The idea of intersectionality and the harmful effects of essentialism are also discussed. The last tenet is voice or counter narrative. This is an important aspect of CRT because it is the ways in which people of Color can tell their histories and narratives. She points out that these narratives must not be rants or vents about wrongdoings but must allow us to understand the ways in which laws and policies operate to reproduce oppressive conditions. She ends with a CRT ‘anti-chronicle’ that illustrates this point.

Part II: Issues of Inequality

Chapter 3

Ladson-Billings begins Part II with her article titled “From the Achievement Gap to the Educational

Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools” (2006). She relates these two ideas to national deficit vs. national debt. The Achievement Gap is something that happens yearly and is measured, mostly by standardized test scores, but can have other measures as well, such as average income or average expenditure per student, as the national deficit is the amount of spending over budget each year. Just as national debt is the accumulation of deficits over the course of history, Educational Debt is the result of the achievement gap over time. Ladson-Billings details many of the debts that result in the education debt, including historical debt, economic debt, sociopolitical debt, and moral debt. She briefly describes each of these types of debt before offering reasons to address the debt. Finally, she brings forth implications of this mounting debt and what it means for the future. Two aspects of making education more equitable that have never truly been enacted are school desegregation and funding equity. Until these aspects are fully realized, education debt will continue to grow and trust in the educational system will not be fostered in marginalized communities. It will take a catastrophic event that demands the complete rebuilding of the educational system in order for this to happen, according to Ladson-Billings.

Chapter 4

This chapter contains Ladson-Billings’ article “Through a Glass Darkly: The Persistence of Race in Education Research and Scholarship” (2012). She investigates the historical intertwining of race and education. She questions the foundational educational research upon which many programs in our schools are based, such as the Stanford-Binet test, which was the creation of a eugenicist, Lewis Terman. His studies excluded entire groups of eligible subjects; however, instead of questioning his sampling methods, schools base many gifted programs off his work. She also discusses how the

field of sociology has followed the political trends regarding race. This is problematic because research then replicates the systems of oppression instead of pushing back against them. Ladson-Billings also discusses the anthropological beginnings of race as a social construct before diving into race and education research. She details the path she took to develop the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, after studying teachers who were successful in teaching children of Color. This, then led her to grapple with CRT. She briefly describes CRT and then ends the chapter with a CRT chronicle to demonstrate the inequities for African American students within the school system, in both majority White schools and majority African American schools. This chronicle describes the experiences of two African American siblings in a predominantly White high school and the excellence they obtain; however, also chronicling the oppression they face. Their third sibling attends a predominantly African American high school, where she also excelled, but she was discriminated against during the college admissions process. The moral of the chronicle was, no matter what people of Color do, race matters.

Chapter 5

“New Directions in Multicultural Education: Complexities, Boundaries, and Critical Race Theory” (2003) is the article that Ladson-Billings chose to highlight in this chapter. Throughout the chapter, she draws parallels between multicultural education and jazz music, both of which are fluid, dynamic, steeped in tradition, but also constantly evolving with the times. She reminds us that we need to do more than just going through the motions of multicultural education by developing a rubric for multicultural education. The rubric she proposes uses McLaren’s (1994) forms of multiculturalism, which she describes and gives examples of. She describes critical multiculturalism as allowing for deciphering knowledge, which, “...helps people see

through the veneer of inclusion to the ways in which diversity or multiculturalism is being manipulated to maintain and justify the status quo” (p. 103). However, she does not think that critical multiculturalism is adequate. Ladson-Billings discusses the tensions that intersectionality surface within multiculturalism and multicultural education. She also discusses the tensions that occur when different groups of people are at odds with each other. Ladson-Billings proposes that CRT can be used to look at multicultural education in a new way, discussing what CRT means for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Ways to push back against the system that are suggested including using native languages in the classroom; think about the ways that technology has given the ‘West’ influence throughout the world; and civilized allegiances, for example, Spanish speakers having a strong affinity for each other, even though they are from different countries.

Chapter 6

In “Landing on the Wrong Note: The Price We Paid for *Brown*” Ladson-Billings (2004) discusses the implications of the landmark desegregation case *Brown v Board of Education*. While she respects the work of the many activists involved in this case, she begins by outlining the ways in which the *Brown* decision is an example of interest convergence. Unfortunately, the court proceedings limited the resulting actions. The plaintiffs were fighting racism within a racist system, so they used the arguments they thought would advance their case, but these arguments ended up being damaging. The implication of this is clear, “The ability to pathologize the plaintiff instead of addressing the underlying pathology – White supremacy – of the defendant severely limited the ruling and its implementation throughout the land” (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 131). Ladson-Billings also argues that desegregating schools is not enough, we need to

desegregate society as well. She discusses the costs of the *Brown* decision as well such as: the job loss for African American teachers and administrators; the beginning of private schools to further segregate White students in their own academies; that *Brown* was a catalyst for the White resistance movement; and the resegregation of students through tracking in schools. Ladson-Billings does point out that as problematic as some of the results of *Brown* are, there have also been shifts in the right direction, such as the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and many gender equity policies for co-education.

Part III: Epistemology and Methodologies

Chapter 7

The article titled, “Racialized Discourses and Ethnic Epistemologies” (2000) kicks off Part III. Ladson-Billings begins this chapter by describing what epistemology is. She then looks at the Eurocentric paradigm to show the progression of ‘scientific thought’ from the older truths that came from the Christian Church. However, during the Enlightenment, the leaders of the American Revolution had to justify their conflicting values of liberty, justice, and equality as opposed to their use of slave labor. They relied on “science” to determine that African Americans were inferior and relegated to their station in life as slaves. This paradigm leaves a lot to be desired for scholars of Color, who most often look to alternate epistemological frameworks to describe their experiences and knowledges. She cites W.E.B. Du Bois’ notion of double consciousness as being a new epistemology through which the experiences of people of Color can be narrated. This is reinforced by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) when they discuss how dominant groups in society have a limited view of it because they do not have to understand the perspectives of minoritized groups to be successful (p. 70). She elaborates upon how group membership affects a researcher’s position

and knowledge in their scholarship. She also discusses the rationale for scholars of Color to go back to their communities to give voice to their own communities. She finishes up this chapter with a look at how CRT can influence critical qualitative research.

Chapter 8

This chapter contains Ladson-Billings’ article, “Critical Race Theory and the Postracial Imaginary” (2017). She illustrates that there is nothing ‘post’ about the racial situation in the U.S. now. She wants to “...speak back to the postracial and colorblind narratives by discussing what critical race theory (CRT) teaches researchers and scholars about qualitative research, and the lives of people of color” (p. 184). Ladson-Billings suggests what Guinier and Torres (2003) termed political race, which means using the differing categories of identity to your advantage, even for White people who want to lend their White privilege to the fight for equity. Takacs (2002) also values the idea of connecting positionality and epistemology to work towards social justice in education. Ladson-Billings describes the ways in which social scientists have looked at race, again referencing the work of the eugenicist Terman in the early 20th century. Ladson-Billings then circles back to the potential of CRT, as well as its challenges. She closes the chapter with a chronicle illustrating the fact that race still matters in our society.

Postscript

Ladson-Billings chose “The Social Funding of Race: The Role of Schooling” (2018) published as the Postscript for the book. In this Postscript, Ladson-Billings analyzes the ways in which we, as a society, *fund* race and how this leads to inequitable practices in U.S. education. She describes the concept of *funding* through the example of literacy and how our

society values and embeds literacy into our ways of being from the beginning of our children's lives. She states that we also fully fund the idea of race in our society. This happens for our children at a young age, based on adult reactions to their observations about race. She uses a metaphor to explain that while we have not created the racial funding in our society, we do need to take responsibility for maintaining it. The places where racial funding affects education are access to equal education, the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and discipline and classroom management. As teacher educators, it is difficult for us to advocate for educational equity because the idea of race is so well-funded. For pre-service teachers that in the short time we have them at the university, it is difficult to do more than scratching the surface. Ladson-Billings ends by challenging teacher educators to work to defund race, as difficult as it may be.

In Closing

This latest book by Ladson-Billings is an engaging arrangement of her work, which moves through both her journey in her scholarship in CRT as well as an understanding of CRT, how it can operate in society, and how scholars and teacher educators can engage with CRT to create more equitable educational opportunities for students of Color. I appreciated that many of the important works she cites and themes she draws are cyclical throughout the book and help to illuminate her message of what CRT is intended to accomplish.

As someone who has previously read some of Ladson-Billing's work, I appreciated the construction of the book to allow for a deeper understanding of the ways that CRT in education scholarship has evolved. I was able to look at the readings as a whole for a better understanding of the role race plays in educational contexts and how we all play a part in replicating oppressive systems. The focus on disciplines outside of education throughout the book was helpful in illustrating Ladson-Billing's point that inequity is not just an educational issue, but a societal issue that will not be solved only by fixing the educational system.

The intended audiences for this book are scholars, academics, and teacher educators, and I believe that it was written appropriately for that audience. Many of the people who will read this book will have already read some or all of the chapters; however, as I previously stated, the arrangement of the articles presents the information in a specific way that allows the reader to access the material from a new perspective. This book moves readers beyond CRT in educational settings to give a rich background and history of both CRT and oppression in the U.S. Ladson-Billings draws from many disciplines to show how interconnected the systems of oppression are and how CRT can also develop an interconnected system to push back against those systems. The problem of oppression is not only a problem in the educational system, but a problem in society and Ladson-Billings draws our attention to the need for reform, both in schools and in society.

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