

Extended Commentary: Critical Race Theory, Identity Politics, and the Problem of Social Solidarity

The November 2021 election cycle was the first time that the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in K-12 schools emerged as a prominent issue for voters. According to *Ballotpedia*, a political tracking website that compiles information about elections across the United States, seventy-six school districts in twenty-two states featured candidates that took a stance on CRT or the teaching of race.¹ Arguably the most talked about election featuring CRT was the Virginia gubernatorial race between Glenn Youngkin, the Republican candidate, and Terry McAuliffe, the Democratic candidate. Youngkin's closing arguments in the campaign included a call to ban the teaching of CRT and in particular Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the Pulitzer Prize winning novel about the brutalities of slavery, which also contains scenes about sex, violence, infanticide, and bestiality. In this regard, a Youngkin campaign ad aired toward the end of the campaign featured a woman expressing her concern that her son had been assigned to read *Beloved* in his high school Advanced Placement English Literature class.²

Youngkin won the election by two percentage points, and exit polls found that concerns about education, along with the economy and jobs, were the most important issues on voters' minds.³ While other factors may have been more determinative of the outcome—mainly, issues related to the national political scene⁴—McAuliffe appeared to be caught flat-footed about how to respond to the charges against CRT. In the second and final debate of the campaign, he said, "I'm not going to let parents come into schools and actually take books out and make their own decision. ... I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach." Youngkin seized on the latter statement and accused McAuliffe of not listening to and being out of touch with parents. As he said, "What we plan on doing is making sure that schools are teaching our children how to think and not what to think, that ... we're engaging with parents and listening to

them.” He also weaved into the fabric of parental concerns issues related to transgender bathrooms and mask and vaccine mandates in schools.⁵

However long CRT remains a prominent issue in political campaigns, conservative activists of the political right have made their intentions clear.⁶ Christopher Rufo, a senior analyst at the Manhattan Institute, a “free market” think tank, who was one of the chief architects of Donald Trump’s now-rescinded executive order banning CRT and diversity training in all federal programs, puts it bluntly:

The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think “critical race theory.” We have successfully frozen their brand ... into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural ... constructions that are unpopular with Americans ... under that brand category. ... Critical race theory is the perfect villain.⁷

In turn, defenders of CRT on the political left insist that it is not being taught in K-12 schools and that right-wing activists are engaged in a dangerous game of misrepresentation and censorship.⁸

In this article, I engage this debate by clarifying what CRT is and how it is applied and practiced. I situate the controversy in terms of the broader politics of identity among both the political left and right in the United States, as well as the more general problem of social solidarity and the challenge of incorporating diversity and multiculturalism in today’s racially polarized political environment.

What is Critical Race Theory?

CRT was developed in the 1970s by a group of left-leaning, Black lawyer-civil rights activists and law professors, most notably Harvard Law Professor Derrick Bell.⁹ In its origin it was an outgrowth of a more general branch of legal scholarship known as Critical Legal Theory (CLT), which challenged the idea that the law was objective and above politics and bias¹⁰—for

example, that judges, including U.S. Supreme Court judges, are politically neutral.¹¹ CRT offered itself, too, as a critique of CLT for its neglect of race in its analysis of law and society.

The general thrust of CRT is its postulate that the law is not neutral, or colorblind, with respect to matters of race; and that racism is endemic, or systemic, in the legal system.¹² It challenges the view, expressed by the Roberts Court, for instance, that there is no longer any need for special protections against racial disenfranchisement and voter suppression.¹³

Discrimination in the criminal justice system is also typically offered as an example of systemic bias, although one need not invoke CRT to make this observation, which is well documented in the mainstream criminology literature.¹⁴ Other areas of discrimination include, but are not limited to, bias in housing, banking and government loan programs, and hiring.¹⁵ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic refer to such matters as “materialist” components of CRT, because they involve practices that affect the physical circumstances of people’s lives.¹⁶

In addition to materialist components, Delgado and Stefancic identify “idealistic” components of CRT that focus on such matters as prejudice in interpersonal interactions and speech, representations of race in popular culture, and educational curricula. Here, corollary elements of CRT that have proved especially controversial revolve around concepts such as whiteness, white privilege, implicit or unconscious bias, and micro-aggressions; and that implicate White people in the ongoing oppression of Black people and other people of color.¹⁷ A backlash against this part of CRT should not have been unexpected.

When defenders of CRT say it is not taught in K-12 schools, they are in some ways evading the issue, as conservative commentators are quick to point out. For example, columnist Marc Thiessen cites a memo issued by the state superintendent of public instruction in Virginia that encouraged the use of CRT training materials.¹⁸ In Virginia’s Loudoun County, which Thiessen describes as “ground zero in the debate over the role of parents in their kids’

education,” the school district paid \$314,000 to The Equity Collaborative (TEC), a consulting firm that aims to put CRT into practice to build “more equitable learning environments.”¹⁹ In its presentation entitled “Introduction to Critical Race Theory,” TEC instructs teachers that racism is “an inherent part of American civilization” and that ideas such as “colorblindness, the neutrality of the law ... and equal opportunity for all” serve to preserve “whites’ power and strongholds within society.”²⁰ Thiessen objects that “children are being instructed by teachers trained in CRT to see everything through the prism of race ... and to believe that society is divided into two classes—oppressors and oppressed—and that which you are is determined by the color of your skin.” Conservatives also have raised objections to the use of surveys that have been given to students that purport to measure “white bias” and more generally, according to CRT critics, advance the idea that White people should feel guilty about the advantages they have reaped from the sins of history.²¹

Defenders of CRT often dismiss these complaints as a product of White people’s fragile racial egos, which makes them uncomfortable and defensive when talking about race and mistaken in their belief that race doesn’t matter anymore and that we live in a colorblind society.²² More sympathetically, liberal columnist Esther Cepeda writes:

I get it. No one wants to have a super thorny conversation with their kids about why a lot of the wealth of our nation came from exploiting the people who lived in North America before the “pilgrims” showed up and by enslaving people who never intended to be relocated here. ... It’s awkward to attempt to reckon with things that happened ... [long] ago and don’t feel like they have any real impact ... today. ... [But] it shouldn’t be a big deal to admit your life is better in this country because you have the power that comes with visibly belonging to the dominant group in the nation.²³

Indeed, as historian Heather Cox Richardson observes, any credible account of U.S. history must begin with the acknowledgement that “America began with a great paradox: the same men who came up with the idea of constructing a nation on the principle of equality also owned slaves, thought Indians were savages, and considered women inferior. ... For the Founders, the concept

that ‘all men are created equal’ depended on the idea that the ringing phrase ‘all men’ did not include everyone.”²⁴ The task before us still remains the realization of equality for all.

In my view, law professor Randall Kennedy is one of the most balanced observers of the CRT controversy.²⁵ On the one hand, he adamantly objects to anyone who attempts to vilify or demonize CRT “thinkers who are trying to deepen, sharpen, and reframe ways in which racial matters are portrayed and discussed ... [and] who would challenge the ... whitewashed fable of American exceptionalism”—that the United States has always been and still is the greatest country in the world.²⁶ On the other hand, he is willing to critique CRT acolytes when they, in his estimation, overreach. He notes, for instance, that journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones’s claim in the Pulitzer Prize winning *New York Times* “1619 Project”—that protecting slavery was a primary “motivation behind the American colonists’ move to secede from the British empire”—has been disputed by historians.²⁷ He also is skeptical of diversity or sensitivity trainings that “can be tendentious, overbearing, and even coercive,” as well as of the “notion that there has been no appreciable advancement by Black people since 1950.” He believes it is “a mistake to refrain from publicly criticizing any aspect of the racial equity camp out of a sense of solidarity with those being targeted by the right-wing campaign.”

Adopting that posture entails accepting indefinite inhibition since the prospect of right-wing attack is always present. The racial crisis is a large, complex, difficult problem that will require for clarification, much less resolution, knowledge and insight ... from ... different vantage points ... [and] will almost inevitably entail disagreements. Avoiding friction for the sake of displaying a putative solidarity will come at the price of evading disputes that are essential to confront.²⁸

To be sure, there is a censorious impulse that emanates from those on the political left, who have called for prohibitions on the teaching of certain books (e.g., *Huckleberry Finn* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*) and the removal of public monuments or the names from buildings that commemorate the founding fathers if they owned slaves or said something that is objectionable by contemporary standards.²⁹ A legitimate debate is to be had over such measures.³⁰ Moreover,

there are cases in which teachers and others have lost their jobs because they used a lesson plan or said something that Black parents or others found objectionable.³¹ Livelihoods are at stake over such matters. However, this censorious and punitive impulse has historically, and in our current time, been far greater on the right.³² Moreover, teachers and other school officials have been subjected to intimidating threats and harassment by right-wing activists (as have election and public health personnel and officials).³³ As Kennedy observes, “The right-wing campaign against racial equity discussion ... eclipses by several degrees left-wing censoriousness. The power that the latter is able to mobilize is dramatically overborne by power of the former, especially its demonstrated capacity to mobilize governmental authority in furtherance of its aims.”³⁴

Identity Politics and the Opposition to CRT

Beyond the particulars of the current debate over CRT, the controversy should be seen as part of the broader politics of identity in the United States. “Identity politics,” a term that emerged in the 1970s, is often used as a pejorative, but it need not be viewed that way.³⁵ It is a phenomenon of both the political left and right, which is often cast as involving cultural matters while the conflict is portrayed as involving “culture wars.”³⁶ Both sides make use of a general discourse of victimization, which historian Joseph Amato characterizes as “the major moral axis of our times,” a discourse about “who suffers what at whose hands” that structures claims and counterclaims about the past and its implications for the present.³⁷

Political scientist Francis Fukuyama credits psychologist Erik Erikson with popularizing the concept of identity in the 1950s through his theory of child development and the life cycle.³⁸ But whereas Erikson considered identity as a property of individuals, identity politics views it as a property of groups.

Fukuyama thinks that much of what is often construed as economic motivation or economic self-interest actually reflects a desire for public recognition and dignity and therefore cannot be satisfied by economic means alone.³⁹ On the political left, a view that is represented in CRT, it involves a social movement of a multitude groups—based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and other social statuses, as well as the multiple “intersectionalities” of these statuses—whose members have felt marginalized, devalued, or mistreated.⁴⁰ They have demanded equal access to societal resources and justice in the legal system, and have advanced a multicultural vision for American society—the idea that the United States is composed of diverse groups that are entitled to promulgate their unique identities and cultural experiences.

Fukuyama notes that identify politics on the left has been decoupled from its historical focus on economic and class issues.⁴¹ Its rise has taken place in the midst of globalization, the dominance of monopolistic corporations, and the movement of US jobs overseas, which has led to unprecedented levels of economic inequality; and the failure (or unwillingness) of either the Democratic Party or Republican Party to do anything about it.⁴² In the process, the White working class has been excluded from the leftist cultural agenda and increasingly drawn to right-wing politics and the Republican Party. When left-wing politicians like Bernie Sanders call for renewed attention to this group by advocating for economic reforms that would benefit all racial groups, they have at times been met with scorn from some in the CRT camp. Ta-Nehisi Coates, for example, is critical of those who would rather talk about class than race, fail to offer policy solutions targeted specifically to people of color, and avoid implicating whites in the oppression of racial minorities.⁴³

Liberal political scientist Ruy Teixeira is concerned that this type of cultural leftism imperils the Democratic Party’s ability to win over the “median” White voter who is turned off

by rectitudinous positions on race.⁴⁴ He notes that most people will agree that discrimination and racism are bad, but they do not think they factor in as “the cause of all disparities in American society.” People may be willing to admit that “no one is completely without bias,” but calling all White people who benefit from White privilege racist or implicitly biased “is not right or fair. ... Police misconduct and brutality against people of any race is wrong,” but calls for “defunding the police” are misguided. Teixeira argues that cultural views have a life of their own, and many voters’ discomfort with a Democratic Party that is associated with the cultural left will continue to pose a problem in winning elections regardless of the economic platform it advances.⁴⁵

Although the political right uses the term identity politics to disparage the left, its political agenda can be understood in those terms as well. Because of its hegemonic status, White identity masquerades as “non-identity,” as if it is not an identity at all, but it is one nonetheless. As such, the current attack on CRT may be seen as the latest permutation of White identity politics—an ongoing grievance about how White people are under attack by multicultural forces using political correctness, cancel culture, wokeness, and CRT to usurp the rights of White people and undermine American society. Nonwhite immigrants and other undeserving racial minorities are viewed as “cutting in line,” gaining unfair advantages, and taking opportunities away from hardworking White Americans—those who are part of what Sarah Palin called the “best of America ... the real America”—who have been waiting patiently for their share of the American dream.⁴⁶

Relatedly, the opposition to CRT may be viewed as the latest racial “dog whistle,” or symbolic code, aimed at riling up and mobilizing the right-wing base of the Republican Party.⁴⁷ It is part of the politics of fear based on a commitment to maintaining the privileges of Whiteness as a birthright, about maintaining White minority rule in the face of changing demographics, and about maintaining this standpoint in the educational system.⁴⁸ The old conflicts over school

desegregation and integration during the earlier civil rights era of the 1950s and 1960s are now being waged over what is taught about race, and how it is taught, in schools.

The attack on CRT is also revealing a new dimension of the older Republican strategy of using “states’ rights” to resist federal government interventions to promote racial equality.⁴⁹ States’ rights are now being transmuted into “parental rights,” a strategy that is suggested by the ways in which Glenn Youngkin framed his complaints about CRT in the aforementioned Virginia gubernatorial campaign. Reflecting on this election, Tina Descovich, a co-founder of Moms for Liberty, a nationwide organization that opposes CRT as well as mask and vaccine mandates, explained, “Parents are engaged and are seeking elected officials at all levels of government who respect their right to direct the education, upbringing and care of their children.”⁵⁰

What parents such as those represented by Moms for Liberty desire is for their children to receive what Donald Trump’s now disbanded Presidential Advisory 1776 Commission—which did not include any historians who specialized in U.S. history—called “patriotic education.”⁵¹ 1776 Action, a group inspired by the 1776 Commission, even calls for political candidates to sign a pledge in support of restoring “honest, patriotic education.”⁵² In its report, which was released two days before Joe Biden was inaugurated as president, the 1776 Commission admits to some flaws associated with the country’s founding: “[T]he American story has its share of missteps, errors, contradictions, and wrongs.”⁵³ However, it insists that these flaws “have always met resistance from the clear principles of the nation, and therefore our history is far more one of self-sacrifice, courage, and nobility.”⁵⁴ School curricula that adopt a more critical view should be rejected as promoting “one-sided partisan opinions, activist propaganda, or factional ideologies that demean America’s heritage, dishonor our heroes, or deny our principles. Any time teachers or administrators promote political agendas in the classroom, they abuse their platform and

dishonor every family who trusts them with their children's educational and moral development.”⁵⁵

Ironically, in light of these claims, it is the Commission itself that has an agenda to promote. It calls for a minimalist federal government that does not interfere with states' rights and limits its functions to matters such as “providing for the nation's security or regulating commerce between states,” and it likens the “shadow government” of progressivism to fascism and communism. It views the “pro-life” position on abortion as consistent with the U.S. Constitution, and lodges complaints against identity politics, which it associates exclusively with the left, as well as against CRT and affirmative action, which it describes as a distortion of the Constitution that replaces “the promise of color-blind civil rights” with preferential treatment.⁵⁶

Importantly, the conservative opposition to CRT should be understood as an organized effort funded by right-wing “free market” plutocrats through their various foundations and think tanks, such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute, and the Bradley Foundation.⁵⁷ These organizations are funding conservative activist groups that train people to swarm school board meetings and organize recall campaigns. They also are crafting model legislation that is being introduced around the country. Typically, these bills prohibit teaching any controversial subject that causes a student to “feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex.”⁵⁸

Teachers who violate these rules may be subject to fines or even dismissal, and individual schools or school districts may have their funding withheld. Some of these bills specifically prohibit the teaching of CRT and/or concepts associated with CRT. In Wisconsin, for instance, the Republican-controlled legislature passed a bill that goes so far as to prohibit a wide range of concepts in public school curricula and teacher training, including multiculturalism, systemic racism, anti-racism, conscious and unconscious bias, culturally responsive teaching and

practices, micro-aggressions, restorative justice, social justice, white privilege, and white supremacy.⁵⁹ At the time of this writing, eight states have passed bills of this nature, and about twenty more have bills pending.⁶⁰

Elsewhere I have explained how the contemporary conservative movement has joined the moneyed interests of the economic elite who call for tax cuts for the wealthy and deregulation of the economy with the grievances of White common folks, also known as “the base” of the Republican Party.⁶¹ These laissez-faire economic policies have not helped the rank-and-file, but the scapegoating of racial minorities, immigrants especially, has given them a target for their dissatisfaction with their lot in life. Richardson views this as an age-old strategy by which economic elites have exploited the racial divide by encouraging Whites to think they are being besieged by undeserving people of color in ways that will lead to the loss of their freedoms and way of life.⁶² Indeed, a recent survey by the Public Religion Research Institute found that 80 percent of Republicans, but just 33 percent of Democrats, believe that “America is in danger of losing its culture and identity.”⁶³

The Problem of Social Solidarity

Since Émile Durkheim’s *The Division of Labor in Society*, first published in 1893, sociologists have been concerned with the question of how societies achieve cohesion, which he analyzed in terms of concept of social solidarity.⁶⁴ Contemporary social theorist Jeffrey Alexander characterizes social solidarity as the normative glue that holds society together, the sense of “we-ness” or connectedness that members feel toward one another, the sense of who belongs and who does not belong to the group.⁶⁵ Alexander calls this the civil sphere of society, which he views as a cultural phenomenon that is relatively autonomous from other social institutions, containing its own contradictions marked by a tension between stasis and change

and between particularistic and universalistic criteria of inclusion. He offers some analytical tools to help us understand the terrain that is being traversed by the controversy over CRT.

In his day, Durkheim was concerned with the transition of homogenous agrarian societies to heterogeneous industrial societies.⁶⁶ In the former, according to Durkheim, solidarity is achieved through common experiences of similar work, family arrangements, and religious beliefs. In the latter, solidarity is achieved through the interdependence and complementarianism of individuals who are more specialized in their occupational functions. Clearly this account is too simplistic to be of much use for us in theorizing about the current state of social fragmentation and political polarization, especially about race.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the question of how, or if, social solidarity can be achieved remains relevant to the dilemma we face today.

Alexander notes that solidarity can be created through either exclusionary or inclusionary criteria, and he illuminates the dynamics underlying these criteria through a theory of incorporation. As he writes, “Incorporation points to the possibility of closing the gap between stigmatized categories of persons” who are viewed as polluting the culture and the utopian promises of a society that claims to offer equality for all.⁶⁸ Alexander conceptualizes this process as involving people on the *periphery* being incorporated into the *core*, which entails expansion of the criteria for equal membership beyond what was more narrowly envisioned by a nation’s founders.

The founders of [all] societies manifest distinctive racial, linguistic, religious, and geographical origins ... [and establish their own] primordial qualities . . . as the highest criteria of humanity, as representing a higher competence for civil life. Only people of a certain race, who speak a certain language, who practice a certain religion, who make love in a certain manner, and who have immigrated from a certain part of the globe—only these very special persons actually possess what it takes to be members of [their] ideal society.⁶⁹

Thus it is the founders’ characteristics—in the United States it was being White, Protestant, male, and descended from Great Britain—that establish the core criteria for inclusion in the civil

sphere, of who is an authentic member of the nation, entitled to all the rights that membership in the nation provides. These social markers function as symbolic codes for who “really” belongs and who does not belong to the group.

In all societies, the characteristics of the founders are also the ones that are mythologized in the nation’s creation narratives. These narratives, as in the American paradox, may eulogize about universal rights but deny these rights to particular categories of persons. Nevertheless, as members of peripheral groups make demands that the nation live up to its universal claims, members of the core have often been “convinced that beneath the differences of race, of religion, and so forth there exists a common humanity worthy of civil respect” and full membership.⁷⁰ On the other hand, there are always “repressive closure movements” that try to contain expansion of the civil sphere, even turn the clock back, and reassert a more exclusionary vision of the country.⁷¹ In the age of Trump, White supremacists and White supremacist ideology previously thought beyond the pale have even made inroads into the mainstream of the Republican Party.⁷²

Insofar as the United States can be understood as a history of migrations, both voluntary and involuntary—imposed on the indigenous populations—every new group that has arrived on the nation’s shores since its founding has been considered inauthentic at best and dangerously polluted at worse. People have always asked, “Can the newly arrived Irish immigrants ever become good Americans? Can Jews? Can the newly arrived immigrants from China, Japan, Mexico, Somalia, and Iraq? How can this be possible if they are so different from us?”⁷³

At the same time, according to historian Eric Goldstein, the essential divide in the nation since its founding has always been between Blacks and Whites, a racial bifurcation that has “served as a master narrative” by which White Americans of diverse immigrant backgrounds “could fortify their own self-image and imagine themselves as racially superior.”⁷⁴ While White Americans have “recognized the existence of many ‘racial’ groups ... that did not fit easily into

this binary system of categorization, this did not prevent them from viewing African Americans as a central paradigm for racial ‘otherness.’”⁷⁵

Over time, as subsequent generations of European immigrants who had formerly been viewed as less-than-White and less-than-American assimilated—such as the Jews, Irish, Poles, and Italians—their particular historical and cultural experiences could still be contrasted with culturally deficient Nonwhite groups. These White groups were now considered to be “ethnic,” rather than racial or foreign, and cleansed of their polluting qualities. Indeed, anthropologist Karen Brodtkin observes that the term “ethnicity” first gained credence in academic and public-policy circles after World War II to describe such differences.⁷⁶

In his schema, Alexander identifies three modes of social incorporation—*assimilation*, *hyphenation*, and *multiculturalism*—and notes that even inclusionary forms of solidarity can be constructed in different (though non-mutually exclusive) ways.⁷⁷ In assimilation, which I have alluded to already, incorporation is permitted as long as formerly peripheral groups agree to shed their polluted identities. This is accomplished by making a distinction between subordinate *persons* and subordinate *qualities*. The former are allowed into the civil sphere as long as the qualities that make them different are “left behind the door of private life.”⁷⁸ Assimilation is the mode of incorporation imagined in the metaphorical American “melting pot,” but the particular nature of this blend is what is at issue.⁷⁹

In the assimilation mode, individual members of peripheral groups are cleansed, and they are absorbed into the universalizing elements of the core in ways that leave the core intact. This can be seen in symbolic imagery, such as portrayals of Black people in *The Cosby Show*, the most widely watched television program (among all races) of the 1980s, which reinforced what sociologist Herman Gray describes as “a normative white-middle-class construction of family, love, and happiness” that implicitly reaffirmed that the “ideals and values they promote are the

rewards of individual sacrifice and hard work.”⁸⁰ In the assimilation mode, Whiteness retains its singular status as the hegemonic “nonidentity,” and the material conditions of economic and racial inequality persist for large swaths of the population. As such, the disparities in resources are inevitably “translated into projections about civil competence and incompetence.”⁸¹ Moreover, patterns of residential segregation that reinforce racial separation continue to undermine opportunities for “such informal activities as friendship, recreation, religious observance, adolescent dating, and marriage” to occur across racial lines.⁸²

Or take the case of assimilation of people from different religious traditions. The White immigrant groups who were historically perceived of as outsiders in the United States were generally non-Protestants, and it was not until the 1950s that the country began to accept a tripartite “Judeo-Christian” tradition of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews that expressed a common inheritance of moral and spiritual values.⁸³ Needless to say, the inclusion of Islam in this inheritance is a ways off into the future, especially because of the polluting symbolic conflation of Islam with Islamic terrorism. Moreover, there are those on the political right who continue to insist that the United States is, at its core, a “Christian” nation, where non-Christians and atheists are tolerated but still treated as holding potentially un-American beliefs.⁸⁴

In the hyphenated mode of incorporation, according to Alexander, the qualities that make peripheral groups outsiders “are viewed in less one-sidedly negative ways ... [and] more tolerated in private and public life.”⁸⁵ Identification with particular sub-groups is not perceived as a potential sign of disloyalty or failure to identify with the nation as a whole. Still, hyphenation is a hybrid status that attempts to balance the maintenance of particular heritages and identities with the universalizing elements of the core that continue to be resistant to outsider qualities that might otherwise redefine the core. Hence, during the 2008 Democratic Party primary campaign, then-candidate Joe Biden could describe candidate Barack Obama as “the first mainstream

African American who is articulate and bright and *clean* and a nice-looking guy” (my emphasis).⁸⁶

In the hyphenated mode, subsequent generations of formerly peripheral groups are defined as Jewish American, Italian American, African American, and so forth. New generations can choose to identify or not identify with these dual identifications; some may feel inclined—whether through voluntary self-imposition or pressure from others—to erase their cultural heritage and distinctiveness in order to find acceptance in the mainstream.⁸⁷ They may be asked to indicate these identifications on surveys, government forms, and other documents, though they are typically given the option to not do so.⁸⁸ Symbolic representations in the media become more complex. Like *The Cosby Show*, for example, the more recent sitcom *black-ish*, which first aired in 2014, portrays an upper middle-class Black family. But unlike Dr. Cliff Huxtable in *The Cosby Show*, Andre “Dre” Johnson in *black-ish* is a successful advertising executive who is ambivalent about middle-class assimilation and wants his family to maintain a connection to their African-American roots and culture.⁸⁹

According to Alexander, it is only with the multicultural mode of incorporation that purification of both subordinated persons and qualities takes place. Diversity of the human condition is celebrated and publicly displayed, as the qualities that were once devalued—being a person of color, practicing a non-Christian religion, immigrating from a non-European country, being LGBTQ, and so forth—are “reinterpreted as representing variations on the sacred qualities of civility,” and where incorporation is viewed as “the achievement of diversity.”⁹⁰ Reflecting on the different ways in which Americans and the French view identity, journalist Rachel Conadio notes that in the United States people are constantly expressing their identities in public, whereas in France “defining yourself by your particular ... identity group ... is seen as corrosive to the polity.”⁹¹

Unlike assimilation and hyphenation, “multiculturalism dramatically expands the range of imagined life experience for core-group members. In doing so, it opens up the possibility not just for acceptance and toleration” but for understanding, recognition, and appreciation.⁹² Social differences “become sources of cross-group identification and ... in this paradoxical manner ... common experiences are created that transcend the discrete communities” of society.⁹³ By valuing sharing and enlargement over separation and diminution, multiculturalism decenters and transforms the core. Racial and ethnic appearances and identifications are displayed affirmatively and represented in the culture, a wider range of sexual and marriage partners become socially acceptable, accommodations for social differences become normative, and the right to be different includes the right of full participation in the democratic processes of the nation.⁹⁴

In this way, Alexander observes, multiculturalism seeks a unique blend of particularity and universality, of difference and commonality. Individuals are allowed to “publicly assert the right to be admired for being different,” and in doing so they strengthen the civil sphere of solidarity by providing “a thread, not of identity in the narrow sense, but of the kind of mutual identification that unites individuals” otherwise dispersed across various social statuses.⁹⁵ As historian Michael Ignatieff suggests, no species other than humans “differentiates itself in [such] individualized abundance,” and it is the very “consciousness of our individuality” that constitutes “what it is to be a human being.”⁹⁶ The degree to which we honor our differences “is our common inheritance, the shared integument that we might fight to defend whenever any of us is attacked for manifesting it.” Under multiculturalism, this is the meaning of *e pluribus unum*?

Conclusion

In this article, I examined claims and counterclaims about what CRT is and how it is applied and practiced, and I situated the dispute in the context of the broader politics of identity among both the political left and right in the United States. I also contextualized the controversy

in terms of the more general problem of social solidarity and the challenge of incorporating diversity and multiculturalism in today's racially polarized political environment.

CRT is an intellectual offspring of the academic and legal left, and has two general conceptual components: a materialist and an idealist strain. The former refers to matters that involve racial discrimination that affects the physical circumstances of people's lives, such as the economic, political, and legal resources they are denied because of their race. The latter refers to matters such as prejudice in interpersonal interactions and speech, representation of race in popular culture, and—as in the dispute over CRT—educational curricula. This strain has arguably proved especially controversial and provoking of a right-wing backlash when it advances a critical appraisal of US history and implicates White people in the ongoing oppression of Black people and other people of color.

As a form of identity politics, the debate over CRT is part of the so-called “culture wars” that divides the political left and right. On the left, identity politics involves a social movement of multiple groups whose members feel marginalized, devalued, or mistreated by the dominant society. They demand that the United States finally make good on its promise of equality for all, and they advance a multicultural vision of American society whereby diverse groups are entitled to promulgate their unique identities and cultural experiences.

On the right, the attack on CRT may be viewed as the latest permutation of White grievance politics, with parental rights replacing states' rights as a framework to advance a program of “patriot education” and a political agenda that maintains White dominance. The movement is funded by “free market” plutocrats opposed to federal government intervention, hence joining the moneyed interests of right-wing economic elites with the grievances of common White folks.

Next, I turned to the general problem of social solidarity, which entails the question of how society can maintain cohesion in the face of social fragmentation, particularly over matters of race. Following Alexander, I considered three modes of incorporation, which refers to the possibility of closing the gap between marginalized and core members of a society: assimilation, hyphenation, and multiculturalism. Assimilation makes a distinction between subordinate persons and subordinate qualities, permitting incorporation if marginalized persons keep their differences in private. Hyphenation is a more tolerant mode of incorporation, which attempts to balance the maintenance of particular heritages and identities with the universalizing elements of the core that continue to be resistant to outsider qualities. Only in the multicultural mode are both subordinated persons and qualities incorporated in a way that transforms the core. Diversity of the human condition is celebrated and publicly displayed, the core is expanded to include a more diverse range of cultural experiences, and solidarity is achieved (paradoxically) by asserting a common humanity based on the valuation of difference.

Yet, this is the rub. How can multiculturalism be a basis for solidarity when it is precisely this mode of incorporation that the political right opposes—even to the extent of passing legislation to prohibit use of the term in educational settings? Fukuyama, for one, does not think that an acceptance and appreciation of diversity is enough to avoid the fragmentation that undermines democracy,⁹⁷ which may be understood, according to Alexander, “as a participatory political community whose citizens display commitments to a public interest that transcends private and egoistic concerns.”⁹⁸ Multiculturalism may be a necessary condition, but it is not a sufficient condition for democratic solidarity. Democracy, Fukuyama argues, can only be maintained if there is a broad-based commitment to the principles of democracy itself: constitutionalism, the rule of law, the accountability of leaders to the voters, and equality for all (if not in outcomes at least in opportunities). While there is nothing “wrong with identity politics

as such”—it is natural for people to want to individuate themselves from others—it becomes problematic when it splinters the country in ways that forestall communicative discourse and compromise between “self-regarding social groups who feel they have little in common ... [and view] themselves as in a zero-sum competition with one another for resources.”⁹⁹ Without a more integrative national identity by which individuals feel a collective pride and sense of patriotism, social solidarity is not possible. Fukuyama believes that the notion of nationalism or patriotism has gotten a bad name because it came to be associated with White Supremacy and ethno-nationalism, but a universal form of identity that takes into account the de facto diversity of the nation remains critical for the survival of democracy.

In this regard, political economist Robert Reich, in his book *The Common Good*, calls for a national conversation about the moral obligations of citizenship and the responsibility individuals in a society owe to each other to look out for their mutually beneficial interests.¹⁰⁰ However, his book is devoted to cataloguing the reasons these obligations have broken down. In particular, he notes that “[t]ruth itself is imperiled as a common good” and that a democracy cannot survive unless citizens “are able to recognize truth, analyze and weigh alternatives, and civilly debate their future.”¹⁰¹ Nor can it survive when one of the major political parties is supporting an anti-democratic agenda of radical partisan gerrymandering, erecting barriers to voting, denying the legitimacy of election results, and even condoning violent insurrection.¹⁰² In fact, the controversy over CRT is but a sideshow to the main event. “If we are going to build a better future,” historian Tony Judt reminds us, “it must begin with a deeper appreciation of the ease with which even solidly-grounded liberal democracies can founder.”¹⁰³ At this juncture in history, failure to consider that the unraveling of democracy and the move to a more authoritarian form of government are possible represents a failure of imagination. Of this state of affairs, journalist George Packer concludes, “Finding shared ground whenever possible in pursuit

of the common good is not most people's favorite brand of politics. But it's the politics we need for the emergency that's staring us in the face, if only we will see it."¹⁰⁴

ENDNOTES

¹Cited in Heather Hollingsworth. "Anti-racism teaching focus fails in Wisconsin recall." *Wisconsin State Journal* (Nov. 4, 2021): A7. See *Ballotpedia.org*.

²Glenn Kessler. "Glenn Youngkin's viral 'child' ad is missing important context." *The Washington Post* (Oct. 27, 2021), www.washingtonpost.com. Eva McKend, and Dan Merica. "Virginia Republican seizes on parental rights and schools fight in final weeks of campaign." *CNN Politics* (Oct. 7, 2021), www.cnn.com. Callie Patteson. "McAuliffe says 'everybody clapped' after he said parents shouldn't be involved in classroom." *New York Post* (Nov. 1, 2021), www.nypost.com.

³*The Washington Post*. "Exit poll results from the 2021 election for Virginia governor" (Nov. 3, 2021), www.washingtonpost.com.

⁴It is common for public sentiment to swing against candidates of the incumbent president's party in off-year and mid-term elections. At the time of the Virginia governor's race, President Joe Biden's approval ratings had fallen and people were frustrated with Congressional Democrats' failure to approve Biden's economic agenda; some pundits also think that McAuliffe ran a poor campaign. Neither should it be assumed that opponents of CRT will win elections by campaigning on this issue. In one school-board race in Wisconsin, for example, four incumbents held off a recall challenge waged by anti-CRT activists that had the support of the leading Republican candidate for governor in 2022. In another school-board race in Minnesota, three conservative candidates failed to win a seat while running against CRT and vaccine mandates. In Connecticut, five school-board candidates who were opposed to CRT lost their elections. See Zack Beauchamp, "Did critical race theory really swing the Virginia election?" *Vox* (Nov. 4, 2021), www.vox.com. Hollingsworth. "Anti-racism teaching focus fails in Wisconsin recall." Tim Roemer. "10 Takeaways from Virginia's election." *The Hill* (Nov. 12, 2021), www.thehill.com.

⁵See Note #2.

⁶A distinction can be made between revanchist (or reactionary) conservatism, of which activist opposition to CRT is a part, and traditional Burkean conservatism. See Ronald J. Berger, "The Devolution of Conservatism: From Edmund Burke to Donald Trump." *International Social Science Review* 97, no. 2 (2021), www.digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu.

⁷Cited in Randall Kennedy, "The Right-Wing Attack on Racial Justice Talk." *The American Prospect* (Sept./Oct. 2021): 17-21; and Patricia J. Williams. "How Not to Talk About Race." *The Nation* (Nov. 1, 2021): 14-17, 23.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (eds.). *Critical Race Theory: Key Writings That Formed the Movement*. New York: The New Press, 1995. Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. New York: New York University Press, 2017. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (eds.). *The Derrick Bell Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 2005. Williams, "How Not to Talk About Race."

¹⁰David Kairys (ed.). *The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique*. 3rd ed. New York: Basic Books, 1998. Mark Kelman. *A Guide to Critical Legal Studies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990. Roberto Mangabeira Unger. “The Critical Legal Studies Movement.” *Harvard Law Review* 96, no. 3 (Jan. 1983): 561-675. It is worth noting that Critical Legal Theory itself may be understood as a branch of a more general “critical theory,” which has its roots in the Frankfurt School of social theory and philosophy in 1930’s Germany. In general, critical theories of all sorts involve an inquiry into relationships of power and domination and how people can be liberated from oppression. Andrew Arato (ed.). *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Bloomsbury, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 1982. In turn, critical theory should be contrasted with more mainstream, apolitical efforts to teach critical *thinking*, which purports to offer an objective way to evaluate the logic and evidence of arguments in order to form sound judgments about issues. Tom Chatfield. *Critical Thinking: Your Guide to Effective Argument, Successful Analysis and Independent Study*. Sage: Newbury Park, CA, 2017.

¹¹This view stands in contrast to recent statements by Justices Samuel Alito, Amy Coney Barrett, and Stephen Breyer. See Piper Hudspeth Blackburn. “Barrett concerned about public perception of Supreme Court.” *AP News* (Sept. 12, 2021), www.apnews.com. Stephen Breyer. *The Authority of the Court and the Peril of Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Ariane de Vogue. “Justice Samuel Alito says Supreme Court is not a ‘dangerous cabal.’” *CNN Politics* (Sept. 30, 2021), www.cnn.com.

¹²See Note #9. CRT suggests that the very notion of colorblindness is an ideological obfuscation of the salience of race in society. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*. 5th ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017.

¹³In a trio of cases—*Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), *Abbott v. Perez* (2018), and *Brnovich v. DNC* (2021)—the court neutered most of the protections previously available through the 1965 Voting Rights Act. See Ian Millhiser. “How America lost its commitment to the right to vote.” *Vox* (July 21, 2021), www.vox.com.

¹⁴Ronald J. Berger, Marvin D. Free, Melissa Deller, and Patrick K. O’Brien. *Crime, Justice, and Society: An Introduction to Criminology*, 4th ed. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2015. Although Michelle Alexander’s book on mass incarceration does not specifically mention CRT, it is often cited to illustrate it (*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2010).

¹⁵Jean Folger. “The History of Lending Discrimination.” *Investopedia* (Nov. 12, 2020), www.investopedia.com. Kim Holloway. “Forced Off Their Land.” *The Nation* (Nov. 15/22, 2021): 16-23. Lincoln Quillian, Devah Pager, Arnfinn H. Midbøen, and Ole Hexel. “Hiring Discrimination Against Black Americans Hasn’t Declined in 25 Years.” *Harvard Business Review* (Oct. 11, 2017), www.hbr.org. Danyelle Solomon, Connor Maxwell, and Abril Castro. “Systemic Inequality: Displacement, Exclusion, and Segregation.” *Center for American Progress* (Aug. 7, 2019), www.americanprogress.org.

¹⁶Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory*.

¹⁷*Ibid.* Carol Anderson. *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*. Bloomsbury, UK, 2016. Robin DiAngelo. *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018. Ijeoma Oluo. *So You Want To Talk About Race*. New York: Seal Press, 2018. David R. Roediger. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, new ed. London, UK: Verso, 2007.

¹⁸Marc A. Thiessen. “Democrats are lying about critical race theory.” *The Washington Post* (Nov. 9, 2021), www.washingtonpost.com. John McWhorter raises similar criticisms in his book,

Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America. New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2021.

¹⁹Cited in Thiessen, “Democrats are lying about critical race theory.”

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Ryan Anderson. “So much buzz, but what is critical race theory?” *Associated Press* (Nov. 2, 2021), www.apnews.com. McWhorter, *Woke Racism*. Thiessen. “Democrats are lying about critical race theory.”

²²DiAngelo. *White Fragility*.

²³Esther Cepeda. “GOP’s secret is branding.” *Wisconsin State Journal* (Nov. 21, 2021): B1-2.

²⁴Heather Cox Richardson. *How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. xv. Of course, this paradox is derivative of the more general paradox of the European Enlightenment, which inspired democratic ideals alongside imperialism, colonialism, “scientific” racism (or Social Darwinism), and genocide. See Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2014. Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Andrew S. Curran. “Inventing the Science of Race.” *The New York Review* (Dec. 16, 2021), www.nybooks.com. Sven Lindqvist. *“Exterminate All the Brutes.”* New York: The New Press, 1992/1996. Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995/2015.

²⁵Kennedy, “The Right-Wing Attack on Racial Justice Talk.”

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²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 21. See Leslie M. Harris. “I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me.” *Politico* (Mar. 6, 2020), www.politico.com. Adam Serwer. “The Fight Over the 1619 Project Is Not About the Facts.” *The Atlantic* (Dec. 23, 2019), www.theatlantic.com.

²⁸*Ibid.* McWhorter (*Woke Racism*) questions CRT acolytes who think that the notion of objectivity and practice of being on time are “white things.”

²⁹Matt Friedman. “New Jersey lawmakers want schools to stop teaching ‘Huckleberry Finn.’” *Politico* (Mar. 21, 2019), www.politico.com. Evan Gerstmann. “San Francisco Votes To Remove Founding Fathers’ Names From Schools At Up To \$1 Million In Taxpayer Expense.” *Forbes* (Jan. 27, 2021), www.forbes.com. McWhorter, *Woke Racism*. Kristine Phillips. “A school district drops ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ and ‘Huckleberry Finn.’” *The Washington Post* (Feb. 7, 2018), www.washingtonpost.com. Julie Zauzmer Well, and Michael Brice-Saddler. “D.C. committee recommends stripping the names of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Francis Scott Key and others from city government buildings.” *The Washington Post* (Sept. 1, 2020), www.washingtonpost.com.

³⁰While the rationale for removing names from monuments and buildings is clear-cut in some cases, such as the memorialization of Confederate leaders, in other cases there are gray areas. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for example, famed actor Frederick Marsh’s name was removed from the student union theatre. Marsh, an alumnus of the university, had belonged to an inter-fraternity group called the “Ku Klux Klan” that was formed in 1919. This group did not appear to have been affiliated with any larger KKK organization, nor is there evidence that it engaged in any acts of intimidation or violence. Historians opposed to the removal of Marsh’s name also note his life-long support of Black artists and civil rights activists. See Kelly Meyerhofer. “A UW-Madison alum’s name was removed from Union space. Some historians call it a mistake.” *Wisconsin State Journal* (Aug. 16, 2021), www.madison.com.

Relatedly, the censorious impulse on the left is reflected in incidents in which college students have shouted down conservative speakers, preventing them from exercising their right to free speech. However, right-leaning students have done the same to liberal speakers, and liberal

professors have been subjected to critical interrogations by Republican legislators. See Ronald J. Berger. "Academic Freedom and Its Discontents: An Autoethnography." *International Review of Qualitative Research* 7, no. 2 (2014): 258-273. Margaret Cannon. "A UW professor's description of the Trump presidency sets off debate on political bias, academic freedom." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (Feb. 1, 2019), www.jsonline.com. Donald A. Downs. *Free Speech and Liberal Education: A Plea for Intellectual Diversity and Tolerance*. Washington DC: Cato Institute, 2020. Stephen T. Wermeil, and Josh Blackman. "Thwarting Speech on College Campuses." *American Bar Association* 43, no. 4 (2015-2016), www.americanbar.org.

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³⁹Fukuyama, *Identity*. See also Teixeira, “The Cultural Left Puts a Ceiling on Democratic Support.”

⁴⁰Ibid. Alcoff et al., *Identity Politics Reconsidered*. Kimberlé Crenshaw. *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. New York: The New Press, 2017.

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⁴²Ibid. See also David Dayen. *Monopolized: Life in the Age of Corporate Power*. New York: The New Press, 2020. Mariana Mazzucato. *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism*. New York: Harper Business, 2021. Robert Reich. *Saving Capitalism: For the Many, Not the Few*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015. Joseph E. Stiglitz. *Freefall: America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy*. New York: Norton, 2010. Matt Stoller. *Goliath: The 100-Year War Between Democracy and Monopoly Power*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019.

⁴³Ta-Nehisis Coates. *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: Oneworld, 2017. For a critique of Coates’s writings, see McWhorter, *Woke Racism*.

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⁴⁵Ibid. At one time Teixeira thought that an emerging majority of Nonwhite voters would usher in an era of Democratic Party majorities. This was the thesis of a book he co-authored with John B. Judis (*The Emerging Democratic Majority*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002). However, Teixeira and Judis now think it was a mistake to have assumed that Democrats could win elections without appealing to a substantial number of White voters. Moreover, as Nonwhite groups assimilate, Latinos and Asians especially, they increasingly align their identities with Whites and cannot be expected to vote in a particular way. See John Judis. “Redoing the Electoral Math.” *The New Republic* (Oct. 2017), www.newrepublic.com. Guy Molyneux, “Mapping the White Working Class,” *The American Prospect* (Winter 2017), www.prospect.org.

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⁵³The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, *The 1776 Report*, p. 1.

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⁶²Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War*. White supremacists and right-wing media, including *Fox News*, have been circulating this view under the rubric of "replacement theory." See Nellie Bowles. "'Replacement Theory,' a Racist, Sexist Doctrine, Spreads in Far-Right Circles." *The New York Times* (Mar. 18, 2019), www.nytimes.com. Barton Gellman, "Trump's Next Coup Has Already Begun." *The Atlantic* (Dec. 6, 2021): 24-44.

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⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 405.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 410.

⁷¹Alexander, *The Dark Side of Modernity*, p. 129.

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⁷⁴Eric Goldstein. *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 17.

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⁷⁶Alexander, *The Dark Side of Modernity*. Karen Brodtkin. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998.

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⁷⁹*Ibid.* Israel Zangwill, a Jewish immigrant from Russia, popularized the term in his play *The Melting Pot*, which was first staged in 1908.

⁸⁰Herman Gray. *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for "Blackness."* Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995, p. 77. For more recent discussions of racial and ethnic representations in the media, see Mari Castañeda. "The Power of (Mis)representation: Why Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes in the Media Matters," in *Challenging Inequalities: Readings in Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration*, ed. Hortencia Jiménez. San Diego, CA: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2018. Dana Mastro. "Race and Ethnicity in US Media Content and Effects." *Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (Sept. 26, 2017), www.oxfordre.com. Nancy Wang Yuen. *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016.

⁸¹Alexander, *The Dark Side of Modernity*, p. 137. Some observers attribute Black youth's resistance to "acting white" to the experience of marginalization in White majority schools. This legacy has led some Black educators to advocate for the benefits of majority Black schools where Black students are taught mostly by Black teachers. Ronald J. Berger, "Meritocracy and Its Discontents: Inequality in Higher Education." *International Social Science Review* 97, no. 4 (2021), www.digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu. Stuart Buck. *Acting White: The Ironic Legacy of Desegregation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010. Jamilah Lemieux. "Diversity Is Not Enough." *The Nation* (Mar. 22-29, 2021), pp. 18-21. McWhorter, *Woke Racism*.

⁸²Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, p. 448.

⁸³Will Herberg. *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955. Peter Novick. *The Holocaust in American Life*. Boston, MA: Houghton and Mifflin, 1999.

⁸⁴Some right-wing Christians believe that the First Amendment prohibition against the establishment of religion applies only to the federal government, and that it is permissible for individual states to endorse Christian beliefs and values as a matter of public policy. See Jerold S. Auerbach. *Rabbis and Lawyers: The Journey from Torah to Constitution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. Berger, “The Devolution of Conservatism.” Jeff Sharlet. *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. New York: Harper Collins, 2008.

⁸⁵Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, p. 431.

⁸⁶Jake Tapper. “A Biden Problem: Foot in Mouth.” *ABC News* (Feb. 27, 2008), www.abcnews.go.com. Of course, Biden’s remarks were nothing compared to Donald Trump’s racist allegation that Obama was a secret Muslim who was not born in the United States. See Chris Moody, and Kristen Holmes. “Donald Trump’s history of suggesting Obama is a Muslim.” *CNN Politics* (Sept. 18, 2015), www.cnn.com.

⁸⁷Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*. Jay Caspian Kang. *The Loneliest Americans*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2021. The former “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy in the US military illustrates a hyphenated identity that allowed LGBTQ people to serve in the military but prohibited them from revealing their now tolerated sexual orientation in public. See Aaron Belkin, and Geoffrey Bateman (eds.). *Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell: Debating the Gay Ban in the Military*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003.

⁸⁸In this regard, the United States differs from France, where the government “does not formally collect census data on race or ethnicity,” which would be viewed as “a betrayal of universalism and a violation of privacy.” Rachel Donadio. “France’s God Complex.” *The Atlantic* (Dec. 2021): 70-78.

⁸⁹Carl G. Straut-Collard. “Why Everyone Needs To Give The Sitcom *Blackish* A Chance.” *Medium* (Mar. 27, 2017), www.medium.com.

⁹⁰Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, p. 452

⁹¹Donadio, “France’s God Complex,” p. 74. Muslim garb, particularly of women wearing burkas and headscarves in public, has been especially controversial in France.

⁹²Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, p. 451. Alexander’s conceptualism of multiculturalism differs from the way it may be taught in schools. Olneck argues that multicultural education, while incorporating and affirming the experiences of students of color, may still maintain a Eurocentric rendition of US history and has not succeeded in enhancing the “cultural capital” of students of color. Michael R. Olneck. “Can Multicultural Education Change What Counts as Cultural Capital?” *American Journal of Education* 37 (2000): 317-348. Michael R. Olneck. “Re-naming, Re-imagining America: Multicultural Curriculum as Classification Struggle.” *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 9 (2001): 333-355.

⁹³Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, p. 451.

⁹⁴*Ibid.* Other examples of transforming the core include marriage equality for LGBTQ people and architectural accessibility for people with disabilities. At the same time, corporate capitalism has exhibited a remarkable capacity to commodify and monetize social differences without eroding corporate domination of society. See Sam Illing. “How capitalism reduced diversity to a brand.” *Vox* (Feb. 16, 2019), www.vox.com. Additionally, multiculturalism may or may not involve a redistribution of economic and other resources that would mitigate the material inequality associated with social differences. See Douglass Hartmann, and Joseph Gerteis.

“Dealing with Diversity: Mapping Multiculturalism in Sociological Terms.” *Sociological Theory* 23 (2005): 218-240.

⁹⁵Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, pp. 43, 457.

⁹⁶Michael Ignatieff. “Lemkin’s Words.” *The New Republic* (Feb. 26, 2001): 25-28. Durkheim made a similar argument when he wrote that individualism was “the only system of beliefs which [could] ensure the moral unity” of society, “where the members ... having nothing in common among themselves except their humanity.” Cited in Chad Alan Goldberg. “Introduction to Emile Durkheim’s ‘Anti-Semitism and Social Crisis.’” *Sociological Theory* 26 (2008): 299-323, p. 305.

⁹⁷Fukuyama, *Identity*.

⁹⁸Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, p. 45. Alexander associates this conception of democracy with the post-World War II (small-r) republican tradition of political philosophy.

⁹⁹Fukuyama, *Identity*, pp. 115, 130.

¹⁰⁰Robert R. Reich, *The Common Good*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, pp. 33, 107.

¹⁰²Berger, “The Devolution of Conservatism.” Berman, *Give Us the Ballot*. Berman, “Republicans Are Taking Their Voter Suppression Efforts to New Extremes.” Gellman, “Trump’s Next Coup Has Already Begun.”

¹⁰³Tony Judt. *Ill Fares the Land*. New York: Penguin Press, 2010, pp. 220-221. Should an untenable chaos emerge from the current state of affairs and the legitimacy of the US political system erodes even further than it already has, large swaths of the population may become attracted to authoritarian means of establishing stability. As Judt observes, a “stable authoritarian regime is a lot more desirable for most of its citizens than a failed democratic state.” On the rise of authoritarianism around the world, see Anne Applebaum. “The Autocrats Are Winning.” *The Atlantic* (Dec. 2021): 42-54.

¹⁰⁴George Packer. “Imagine the Worst.” *The Atlantic* (Jan./Feb. 2022): 17-20. See also Steven Levitsky, and Daniel Liblatt. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Viking Press, 2018. Barbara F. Walter. *How Civil Wars Start and How To Stop Them*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2022.