
Critical Essay 1

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Course Design: Critical Analyses

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Emily Bailey was born and raised in Keller, Texas. She recently finished her undergraduate career with a Bachelor of Arts in English with a Concentration in Writing and Rhetoric from the University of North Texas (UNT). While in school, she also received her Technical Writing Certificate from the Technical Communications Department at

UNT. In addition to these two fields, she also has an interest in education. Due to this interest, she has an academic background studying equity, literacy, and representation in schools. Other educational passions include harmful LGBTQIA+ legislation, mental health awareness, and fighting against the growing issue of book bans in schools. In the future, Emily hopes to pursue a career in the fields of publishing, marketing, or technical writing. In her spare time, she enjoys cooking, trying new restaurants, spending time with her partner, and playing with her two dogs.

It is no question that counterstories and allegories offer different modes of sharing information to readers than other forms of communication. Professor Derrick Bell is well-known for his use of allegory in illustrating the tenets of critical race theory in easily comprehensible ways. In his unpublished short story titled “Dependent Status,” Bell outlines various lessons throughout the plot, but it is important to identify the main tenet of critical race theory the essay was written to produce – interest convergence.

Interest convergence is the tenet of critical race theory coined by Professor Derrick Bell. He believed since “racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class whites (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it” (Delgado 34). Bell’s most well-known example of the concept of interest convergence is the 1954 landmark court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. He believed this case “may have resulted more from the self-interest of elite whites” (Delgado 34) than from a moral desire to further the Civil Rights movement. Bell argues this decision was reached because white people who held policymaking positions saw the “economic and political advances” that would happen with an “abandonment of segregation” (Bell 524), and decided it was in the white elite’s best interest to

pass this decision. Instead of passing the decision because they had a firm goal of progress, they only chose to pass it for their own benefit.

A major advantage for white elites from this decision, was that it gave credibility to America during their struggle with Communist countries and helped show third-world nations that the United States was making progress. The decision also reassured Black Americans the freedom received during World War II efforts could be seen at home, too. Another reason this decision benefited white people was that segregation became “viewed as a barrier to further industrialization in the South” (Bell 525). These three reasons illustrate how the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* furthered the interests of the white population. Therefore, their interest in the decision converged with the interests of Black Americans, causing the decision to be passed. Bell determined all these facts point to the conclusion that this court case was a prominent example of his interest convergence theory, which eventually became one of the main tenets of critical race theory.

Critical race theory (CRT) began in the 1970s with the writers “Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado” (Delgado 4) while others eventually joined in. Broadly, CRT is a “collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado 3). The movement focuses on conventional civil rights issues from a larger perspective while also questioning the liberal order and other principles. The first formal workshop of CRT was held in 1989 near Madison, Wisconsin. The CRT movement builds upon past movements, such as critical legal studies and radical feminism, while also containing ideas from many well-known theorists and philosophers. A prominent figure of the movement includes Derrick Bell, who was eventually called the father figure of the whole CRT movement. Other key figures are Alan Freeman, “Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Cheryl Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams” (Delgado 6) along with many others. Many of these key figures have identified some of the basic tenets of CRT, which can be used when applying the theory.

While not everyone might support all these as main tenets, a variety of theorists have agreed that they serve to set up the basic idea of CRT. The first tenet is the idea that racism is ordinary, not aberrational – racism is simply a common experience for people of color in America that is not acknowledged or recognized by a lot of people. Challenging dominant ideologies, the second tenet of CRT, challenges “liberal claims of racial neutrality, equal opportunity, objectivity, color blindness, and merit” (Martinez 11). The third tenet of CRT is the idea of interest convergence, a theory created by Derrick Bell, as defined previously. The fourth tenet of this theory is race as a social construct, which holds that race is “[n]ot objective, inherent, or fixed” but rather race and “races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado 9). The fifth tenet is the idea of intersectionality and antiessentialism, which is the idea that everyone has multiple identities that intersect and overlap in various ways, so no one occupies one singular identity. Antiessentialism, the second part of this tenet, goes against the idea of essentialism and asserts that “individuals within groups maintain rights to heterogeneity of perspective, experience, lifestyle, and identity” (Martinez 14). The sixth tenet of CRT, interdisciplinarity, is where the boundaries of disciplines are crossed in order to document and convey the experiences of people (Martinez 14). The seventh tenet of CRT is the need for a centrality of experiential knowledge, where counterstory is used to share the realities of people of color so that white people can acknowledge them. The eighth tenet of CRT is the commitment to social justice, wherein narrative methods of counterstory are used to expose stereotypes and injustice by offering truths through personal experiences. These eight tenets make up the main parts of CRT, defining the movement’s main goals and theories.

CRT’s tenets might be hard for people to fully grasp, so it is important that they are written about in easily comprehensible ways. One method of sharing CRT concepts in a more accessible way for everyone is with allegory, which Derrick Bell is known for. This fits into the tenets of CRT related to the centrality of experiential knowledge and commitment to social justice since the goal of telling a counterstory is to share experiential knowledge and explain concepts such as the tenet of interest convergence in terms of the situation. While Derrick Bell is known for using counterstory and allegory in his “Civil Rights Chronicles” and his classroom, it is less well known that he wrote a short story that identified some of the CRT tenets in 1979. This story is titled “Dependent Status” and although it is unpublished, it is one of Derrick Bell’s earliest attempts at writing counterstory for CRT. While this work was never published, it shows that Bell was focused and committed to writing in a form that would easily outline tenets of CRT for everyday readers, not just people that were already part of the field. This use of allegory to share stories that identify with tenets of the CRT movement allows for more accessibility within the field, which leads to more people learning about the movement. This unpublished piece proves that Derrick Bell was an essential facet in the development of counterstory material in this field.

As Derrick Bell is the theorist who first published the idea of interest convergence, it makes sense that he utilizes it within his stories. The ideas of this tenet are woven throughout his “Civil Rights Chronicles,” but there is now evidence that he was writing about it years before then in other unpublished works. His work titled “Dependent Status” shares the meaning of interest convergence throughout the plot, most notably in one particular quote. The main character in this short story, Professor Motley, says, “Everything has to be compromised to meet standards that are often the very opposite of what our people need” (“Dependent Status” 24). This quote is referring to a Black-run institution, and it shows the reader the basic idea of Bell’s interest convergence concept. The idea that white elites make progressive moves only to further their own agendas while leaving the actual needs of people of color out of the decisions illustrates his theory. This short story was written a year before his 1980 “Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma” article, showing that he was working on this idea for quite some time before he coined the term for it. Although this piece is not as advanced as his “Civil Rights Chronicles” or other articles, it shows that he was working on his use of counterstories for years before he eventually began publishing them.

Derrick Bell’s use of counterstory is integral to the CRT movement, as it keeps racism visible to everyone and allows for accessibility. Bell’s commitment to social justice is shown throughout all his contributions to the CRT movement, but especially with his stories that reflect his theory of interest convergence. His story “Dependent Status” is an early work in the field of CRT that utilizes counterstory to fight for social justice and centralize experiential knowledge, which are two important CRT tenets. These tenets and the use of allegory are what allow more people to be aware of the social injustices going on in the world, leading to the continuing growth of the CRT movement. This was made possible by Bell fighting for his right to use counterstory methods in his classroom, which led him to also publish those counterstories that he built. His own interest convergence theory is accessible to so many people because of the style in which he wrote, and that is imperative for the CRT movement.

Works Cited

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