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ARTICLE



Towards a racial justice project: oral history methodology, critical race theory, and African American education

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ABSTRACT

Oral historians have declared the methodology a social justice project. This essay advances that discussion, positing that oral history methodology may represent a more specific *racial* justice project when coupled with critical race theory. An examination of the history of African American education scholarship, we argue, supports this contention. Two central questions guide this essay: (1) What does scholarship on the history of African American education demonstrate about the compatibility between oral history methodology and critical race theory? and (2) How does this methodological-theoretical pairing advance a racial justice project? We aim to show how critical race theory and oral history methodology complement one another as research tools that can strengthen the history of education's capacity to inform current educational issues. Our essay draws on the work of historians of African American education to exemplify possibilities for any historian of education who examines systematically underserved communities of Colour. Ultimately, we argue that critical race theory and oral history methodology are compatible because they share several propositions apt for helping researchers subvert the silencing, marginalisation, and objectification of systemically underserved communities of Colour, thereby furthering a racial justice project. This essay, therefore, contributes primarily to interdisciplinary education and historical research methods literature.

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Introduction

Reflecting on her novel *Beloved*, Nobel laureate Toni Morrison admitted that she strived to “substitut[e] and rely on memory rather than history because [she] knew [she] could not, should not, trust recorded history”.¹ Her declaration reflected her recognition that “there was no reliable . . . history available to [her characters] . . . because they liv[ed] in a society and a system in which the conquerors write the

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¹Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), 323 – on Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1987).

narrative of their lives”. Those Black figures, Morrison resolved, “are spoken of and written about [as] objects of history, not subjects within it”.² Critical race theory is one perspective that may clarify *why*: because racism; specifically, antiBlack racism; is a permanent feature of the United States.³ Oral history methodology, a crucial tool for enhancing the written record as a racial justice project insofar as erecting and mobilising African American history, suggests a *how* for disrupting such white supremacist expressions of hegemonic and epistemic violence.⁴

The trust of which Morrison spoke points to an enduring issue in the field of education history – that written records so often misrepresent, omit, or silence African Americans and other oppressed groups.⁵ Thus, critical historians of education whose scholarship foregrounds race or ethnicity must revoke the conquerors’ power to mis-tell historical narratives – to objectify racially marginalised peoples of the past. Doing this work often necessitates, when a study’s temporal parameters allow, oral history methodology given its aim to make the historical record reflective of “ordinary” people’s experiences.⁶ Such research endeavours are strengthened with theoretical perspectives such as critical race theory that seek primarily to disrupt white supremacy and inspire racial redress.⁷

Marshalling the perspectives of systematically underserved communities of Colour so they can relay their own stories, their own histories, is a key component of scholarly efforts to further racial justice.⁸ However, analyses of oral history methodology from the perspective of educational historians remain limited – a concerning observation in light of oral history methodology’s potential to help historians of education elevate and honour the experiential knowledge of racially minoritised groups such as African Americans.⁹ Although a small number of historians of education have started to explore the merits of critical race theory vis-à-vis disrupting whiteness, this body of literature has yet to analyse the ways critical race theory and oral history methodology complement one another in guiding researchers to humanise racially marginalised communities as subjects, not

²Morrison, *The Source of Self Regard*, 324.

³Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) and “Racial Realism,” *Connecticut Law Review* 24, no. 2 (1992): 363–79.

⁴Michael-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

⁵*Ibid.* See also Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Macmillan, 2008) and *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: WW Norton, 2019).

⁶Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* and *Wayward Lives*. See also Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).

⁷Bell, *Faces at the Bottom*.

⁸Given the racial or ethnic specificity denoted by this term in reference to groups of people whom United States society does not racialise as white, we capitalise it. In contrast, any reference in this manuscript to peoples racialised as white maintains the lowercase capitalisation to counter the hegemonic status conferred to them by institutional systems of white supremacy. We recognise that the term people of Colour is fraught due to how it collapses groups of people without consideration for intergroup and intragroup differences or acknowledgement of complex histories within such groupings, but we use the term in this essay as it denotes those not racialised as white.

⁹Representative articles dedicated to this topic include Jack Dougherty, “From Anecdote to Analysis: Oral Interviews and New Scholarship in Educational History,” *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (1999): 712–23 and Philip Gardner, “Oral History in Education: Teacher’s Memory and Teachers’ History,” *History of Education* 32, no. 2 (2003): 175–88.

objects, of history.¹⁰

This essay's purpose is twofold: (1) to examine through a critical race theory lens select history of African American education research that engages oral history methodology and (2) to demonstrate that critical race theory represents one theoretical possibility for bolstering this scholarship's connection to more contemporary education issues. Two central questions guide this essay: (1) What does scholarship on the history of African American education demonstrate about the compatibility between oral history methodology and critical race theory? and (2) How does this methodological-theoretical pairing advance a racial justice project? While we recognise important differences between critical race theory and oral history methodology, we aim to show how they complement one another as research tools that can strengthen the history of education's capacity to inform current educational issues. Our essay draws on the work of historians of African American education to exemplify possibilities for any historian of education who examines systematically under-served communities of Colour. Hence, this scholarship is representative of a wider swathe of such histories of education. To accomplish these aims and show how engagement with critical race theory might advance the field of the history of education, we analyse how selected scholarship informs the current debate on critical race theory and its censorship in the United States.

Since 2020, right-leaning, conservative political groups in the United States have fomented an attack on critical historical analyses by framing critical race theory, which we discuss in more depth below, as a sinister, anti-American plot to demean white people or the white history of the United States. The recent slate of legislation in nearly 40 of the United States' 50 states is working to ban critical race theory from use in public education. These actions reveal how little many dominant power-holding groups know or understand about this framework. Primary targets include history curricula and educators, namely history or social studies teachers, whom opponents believe to be promoting anti-racist ideas that cast a disparaging light on the nation's history and cause what they believe to be undue psychological and emotional harm to white students. This misguided assault on and censorship of ideas thought to advance racial equity and justice, something this camp mistakenly views as synonymous with critical race theory, is indicative of the concerning, authoritarian-esque moment in which the United States

¹⁰The following scholars represent education historians who have explicitly used CRT in their historical research: James H. Adams and Natalie G. Adams, "Some of Us Got Heard More Than Others": Studying Brown Through Oral History and Critical Race Theory," *Counterpoints* 449 (2014); Caroline Eick, *Race-Class Relations and Integration in Secondary Education: The Case of Miller High* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Barbara J. Shircliffe, *The Best of That World: Historically Black High Schools and the Crisis of Desegregation in a Southern Metropolis* (Hampton: Hampton University Press, 2006); Eileen H. Tamura, "Education in a Multi-Ethnoracial Setting: Seattle's Neighborhood House and The Cultivation of Urban Community Builders, 1960s–1970s," *History of Education Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2017): 39–67; and Adah Ward Randolph and Dwan V. Robinson, "De Facto Desegregation in the Urban North: Voices of African American Teachers and Principals on Employment, Students, and Community in Columbus, Ohio, 1940 To 1980," *Urban Education* 54, no. 10 (2019): 1403–30; Maria Luce Sijpenhof, "A Transformation of Racist Discourse? Colour-Blind Racism and Biological Racism in Dutch Secondary Schooling (1968–2017)," *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 1–2 (2020): 51–69; David G. Garcia, Tara J. Yosso, and Frank P. Barajas, "A Few of the Brightest, Cleanest Mexican Children: School Segregation as a Form of Mundane Racism in Oxnard, California, 1900–1940," *Harvard Educational Review* 82, no. 1 (2012): 1–25; ArCasia D. James-Galloway, "What Got Them Through: Community Cultural Wealth, Black Students, and Texas School Desegregation," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 25, no. 2 (2022): 173–91; ArCasia D. James-Galloway, "Tacit Curriculum of Black Intellectual Ineptitude: Black Girls and Texas School Desegregation Implementation in the 1970s," *History of Education Review* 51, no. 1 (2022): 81–95; and ArCasia D. James-Galloway and Adah Ward Randolph, "Critical Race Theory and Education History: Constructing a Race-Centered History of School Desegregation," in *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education*, ed. Marvin Lynn and Adrienne D. Dixson, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2021), 330–42.

currently finds itself.¹¹ Sana Rizvi reminds us that these trends are ongoing in other white-dominated countries like the United Kingdom, which recently published “The Report of the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities”, which “effectively rewrites the official narrative on state of racism within the UK and denies any form of institutional racism”.¹² Such resistance illustrates what a critical perspective of history might illuminate about the integral role of white supremacy and what the history of African American education stands to offer this debate – points we highlight in our subsequent analysis.

One of this essay’s contributions is its emphasis on racial justice as distinct from the broader concept of social justice, which may ignore issues of racial subjugation to stress other systems of social oppression, such as classism or (cishetero)sexism. Situating racism at the centre of these structures, we focus on recognising what critical race theorists in education call the “the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination”.¹³ This essay, therefore, also contributes to historical research methods literature a methodological and theoretical discussion that illuminates some key convergences between oral history methodology and critical race theory. In discussing how historians of education might excavate and amplify suppressed perspectives on the past as a bridge to the present, this analysis challenges ongoing expressions of systemic, institutional antiBlackness.¹⁴

We proceed with overviews of critical race theory and oral history methodology. The following section explicates points of alignment between critical race theory and oral history methodology, using critical race theory propositions to structure our discussion. To illustrate how these areas of convergence can serve racially just ends, we feature history of African American education scholarship that demonstrates elements of implicit overlap between critical race theory and oral history methodology. We highlight this body of research because it offers some of the most robust examinations of racial injustice in America’s past that help to clarify why racial inequity persists today. To emphasise the latter point, we briefly comment on each monograph’s relationship to the current critical race theory debate and censorship efforts in the United States. Noting this body of work also helps elucidate global trends of antiBlackness in education, patterns our final section discusses alongside the implications this essay offers education researchers, historians of education, and racial justice/anti-racist scholars more broadly. We contend that historians of education have much to contribute to research discussions in the way of characterising the roots of the issues that currently command great scholarly attention, and this essay offers some examples of those contributions.

¹¹See the following for discussions of these debates: Cathryn Stout and Thomas Wilburn, “CRT Map: Efforts to Restrict Teaching Racism and Bias Have Multiplied across US,” *Chalkbeat*, February 1, 2022, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/22525983/map-critical-race-theory-legislation-teaching-racism>; Johnathan Butcher and Mike Gonzalez, “Critical Race Theory, the New Intolerance, and Its Grip on America,” *The Heritage Foundation*, December 7, 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/civil-rights/report/critical-race-theory-the-new-intolerance-and-its-grip-america>; Stephen Sawchuk, “What Is Critical Race Theory, and Why is it Under Attack?” *Education Week*, May 18, 2021, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05>.

¹²Sana Rizvi, “Racially-Just Epistemologies and Methodologies that Disrupt Whiteness,” *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 45, no. 3 (2022): 225.

¹³Daniel G Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso, “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 25.

¹⁴Michael J. Dumas, “Against the Dark: Antiblackness in Education Policy and Discourse,” *Theory Into Practice* 55, no. 1 (2016): 11–19; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother and Wayward Lives*.

Theoretical and methodological grounding

Although traditional historians, a group that includes many historians of education, tend to resist naming or applying explicit theoretical frames in their scholarship, our work as emerging interdisciplinary historians of education has made our doing so imperative. These tensions around naming one's interpretive lens are longstanding.¹⁵ Granting sustained attention to such in scholarship, however, makes more transparent the process historians use to determine

how and what evidence is collected, the identification of meaning in the evidence, and ultimately the construction of narrative and its contribution to the historical conversation. Theory always matters in historical inquiry. The question is whether we [as historians of education] are conscious of and intentional about the interpretive frames brought to our scholarship and the values, beliefs, and assumptions that underpin them.¹⁶

The practice of understating or omitting which perspective shapes historical scholarship represents an opportunity for much history of education scholarship to establish its relevance to current issues like the critical race theory debates in the United States. As noted, excluding extended theoretical or methodological discussion conceals the analytical process scholars undertook to conduct their research. Including this information stands to make historical writing more instructive for emerging scholars working to learn the craft. Incorporating critical race theory, we suggest, helps address this issue and may expand the reach and relevance of said work, which is vital to contemporary debates about history curricula and instruction.

As Black Southern women historians of education, we are motivated by questions that help us interrogate the ways systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, and classism interacted to differentiate Black students' political and social experiences.¹⁷ Due to the temporal parameters of our work in the 1960s and 1970s, this interest is significantly informed by our employment of oral history methodology, affording us access to living narrators.¹⁸ Their perspectives prove central to our scholarship because we seek to relay historical narratives via their experiences, which challenge many archival and written records about the contexts our work respectively examines. Our collective emphasis on how simultaneous expressions of systemic subjugation shaped the educational experiences of African Americans pushed us to recognise the instructiveness of critical theoretical frameworks such as critical race theory.

A critical race theory perspective exemplifies that oral history methodology can offer important insights into the post-civil rights and post-Black Power eras with which our research is primarily concerned. Our work reveals that this period sought to extend the racial progress of earlier victories like the 1954 *Brown* ruling that outlawed racially separate schooling in the United States; oral history interviews, however, give personal voice to the respective movements' inability to eradicate racial oppression. This shortcoming represents an integral impetus for critical race theory. Furthermore, oral history interviews illuminate critical race theory's argument about the endemic nature of racism

¹⁵Ronald E. Butchart, "What's Foucault Got to Do with It? History, Theory, and Becoming Subjected," *History of Education Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2011): 239–46; Isaac Gottesman, "Theory in the History of Education," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Education*, ed. John L. Rury and Eileen H. Tamura (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 65–82.

¹⁶Gottesman, "Theory," 65.

¹⁷ArCasia D. James-Galloway, "More than Race: Differentiating Black Students' Everyday Experiences in Texas School Desegregation, 1968–1978" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2020); Francena Turner, "Black Women and Student Activism at Fayetteville State, 1960–1972," (PhD diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2020).

¹⁸Francena F.L. Turner and ArCasia D. James-Galloway, "Black Baby Boomers, Gender, and Southern Education: Navigating Tensions in Oral History Methodology," *The Oral History Review* 49, no. 1 (2022): 77–96.

and its critique of liberalism, which stresses equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcome. As historian Elizabeth Todd Breland's examination of Black education reform in Chicago since the 1960s attests, it is difficult to overstate the importance of such first-hand perspectives in research and scholarship, as they often "led [her] to new information, sources, and avenues of inquiry that were otherwise obscured in archives and the official historical record".¹⁹ Thus, access to living primary sources gives us the opportunity to critically analyse written sources for their aforementioned silences and slants.

A small but growing group of scholars have drawn on both oral history methodology and critical race theory to examine different facets of the history of education.²⁰ Much of this scholarship has focused on different dimensions of the history of racial and ethnic groups in education given white supremacy's influence across United States history. While this work has highlighted various factors bolstering racial oppression in education, it has yet to delineate specific ways oral history methodology and critical race theory, when combined, might serve similar ends. As education scholars James Adams and Natalie Adams note, often narrators' "thoughts and actions . . . were produced, in part, by the complex convergence of race, class, gender, geography, and religious beliefs", an insight they used critical race theory to illustrate.²¹ Hence, delineating how the combination of oral history methodology and critical race theory supports racial justice can serve as a guide for scholars interested in contributing deeper and more interdisciplinary examinations of racism in education; this work can, as critical race theorists in education argue, "be effective in transforming unjust institutions [. . . and] move beyond simply telling stories".²²

Critical race theory and relevant influences

In the late 1970s, critical race theory began as a movement born out of critical legal studies that sought to theorise the roles of race and racism more acutely in the legal sphere, growing largely out of frustrations with failures of the Civil Rights Movement to rectify racial discrimination. This theory is eclectic in nature, as "there is no canonical set of doctrine or methodologies to which . . . all [critical race theorists] subscribe".²³ Its intent, however, rests on two major aims: "to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America" and "to not merely understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to *change* it".²⁴ Growing more prominent in subsequent decades and travelling to fields outside legal studies, critical race theory was introduced to the field of education in the mid-1990s by Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate to address the

¹⁹Elizabeth Todd-Breland, *A Political Education: Black Politics and Education Reform in Chicago since the 1960s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 4.

²⁰See note 10 above.

²¹Adams and Adams, "Some of Us Got Heard," 201.

²²Adrienne Dixon and Celia Rousseau, "And We Are Still Not Saved: Critical Race Theory in Education Ten Years Later," *Race, Ethnicity, and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005): 201.

²³Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas, eds., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* (New York: New Press, 1995), xiii.

²⁴*Ibid.*, xiii, emphasis in original.

field of education's heretofore under-theorisation of race.²⁵ Since its introduction, a number of education subfields have taken up the theory; yet, one education subfield that has seen seldom explicit use of critical race theory is the history of education. After the first decade of the twenty-first century, scholars in education begin to methodologically employ many of critical race theory's principles.²⁶

Like critical race theory more widely, critical race theory in education scholarship is "marked by a number of specific insights and observations", which many consider to be the theory's tenets. In part, these themes (1) recognise racism as a permanent and normal feature of the United States, (2) challenge ahistoricism by necessitating analyses rooted in history, (3) elevate counterstories featuring the experiential knowledge of racially oppressed peoples, and (4) require interdisciplinarity, as critical race theory draws from a range of fields such as ethnic studies, women's and gender studies, history, legal studies, public policy, and sociology.²⁷ Critical race theory's interdisciplinarity is rooted in both its legal studies origins and is "arguably necessary in order to make core critical race theory themes useful for multiple racialized groups, both as a matter of theory and practice".²⁸ Because critical race theory represents a movement that aims to expose and mitigate structural white supremacy, its scholarly application coalesces around this objective, distinguishing it from other approaches that might draw on similar fields or disciplines.

An overarching idea of these tenets is that "critical race theory works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression".²⁹ This point supports our emphasis on racial justice specifically and antiBlackness more precisely, aligning it with Black and Africana Studies. Critical race theory also challenges objectivity, neutrality, merit, and race-evasion (i.e. "colour-blindness"), ideas that represent another theme in this body of scholarship.³⁰ This lens highlights that the ultimate function of racism across United States history reflects a system of racial power embedded within and reinforced throughout social institutions such as education.³¹

We are far from the first to recognise critical race theory's serviceability to the history of education. In a recent review of theory in the history of education, Isaac Gottesman noted growing "theoretical innovations [are . . .] being referred to as critical race approaches to history of education;" he went on to underline that "critical race theory, which has become an influential theoretical framework in educational research writ large, has been especially adept at teasing out the ways in

²⁵Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," *Teachers College Record* 97 (1995): 47–68.

²⁶For example, see Laurence Parker and Marvin Lynn, "What's Race Got to Do with It? Critical Race Theory's Conflicts with And Connections to Qualitative Research Methodology and Epistemology," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (2002): 7–22; and Solórzano and Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology;" Jessica T. DeCuir-Gunby, Thandeka K. Chapman, Paul A. Schultz, eds., *Understanding Critical Race Methods and Methodologies: Lessons from the Field* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

²⁷Edward Taylor, David Gillborn, and Gloria Ladson-Billings, eds., *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 4; see also Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*; Adrienne Dixon, Celia K. Rousseau Anderson, and Jamel K. Donnor, eds., *CRT in Education: All God's Children Got a Song*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

²⁸Isaac Gottesman, *The Critical Turn in Education: From Marxist Critique to Poststructuralist Feminism to Critical Theories of Race* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 130.

²⁹Dixon and Rousseau, "And We Are Still Not Saved," 4.

³⁰Mari Matsuda, "Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparation," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Law Review* 22 (1987): 323–99.

³¹Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*; Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings, *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education*.

which racism is embedded in schooling policies and practices”.³² This comment importantly acknowledges that critical race theory offers something useful to the history of education. As merely one option for an interpretive frame, critical race theory supplies the history of education – particularly that concerned with race or ethnicity – an organised body of thought for analysis. Additionally, Gottesman suggests that principles comprising critical race theory have indeed been embraced, perhaps implicitly, by historians of education. The historiography of African American education may well illustrate this point alongside the salience of the Black and Africana Studies tradition, which preceded critical race theory. Africana Studies scholar Reiland Rabaka argues that seminal scholar-activist W. E.B. Du Bois, who lived from 1868 to 1963, established in his scholarship “a philosophy of race [that] in many senses foreshadows contemporary critical race theory and, therefore, contributes several paradigms and theoretic points of departure”.³³

In acknowledging critical race theory as an instructive tool for educational historians, we refrain from implying that it is the first or only framework to contest antiBlackness in scholarship. We see critical race theory as one tool aligned with the history of education, especially that focused on race or ethnicity, and we recognise two of its antecedents as critical theory and the Black and Africana Studies tradition.³⁴ Scholars such as Du Bois, Darlene Clark Hine, Frantz Fanon, Carver G. Woodson, Deborah Gray White, V.P. Franklin, Paula Giddings, and James D. Anderson have a long history of drawing on Black and Africana studies to explicate antiBlack oppression while highlighting acts of resistance, agency, and self-determination. Their work has also challenged the violence and erasure that conventional productions of history perpetuate against Black peoples. In using their scholarship to undermine inaccurate, dominant narratives subordinating Black people, these scholars often deployed what critical race theory terms counter-storytelling, a rejection of ahistoricism, and interdisciplinarity.³⁵

The early to mid-twentieth-century scholarship of Du Bois, Fanon, and Woodson in particular makes apparent that critical race theory was inspired by what would come to be known as ethnic studies. This movement took off on college campuses in the 1960s across the United States, and its framework is marked by “antisubordination ideology”, “is closely intertwined with the objective of critical race theory” and “offer[s] in-depth explorations of the histories of marginalized groups in the United States, disrupting dominant narratives often present in Eurocentric curricula in

³²Gottesman, “Theory,” 73.

³³Reiland Rabaka, “WEB DuBois’s ‘The Comet’ and Contributions to Critical Race Theory: An Essay on Black Radical Politics and Anti-Racist Social Ethics,” *Ethnic Studies Review* 29, no. 1 (2006): 23.

³⁴Gottesman, “Theory,” 73.

³⁵W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998 [1935]); Deborah Gray White, *Art’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985); Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Vincent P. Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia: The Social and Educational History of a Minority Community, 1900–1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979); Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1984); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) originally published in French in 1952; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1964), originally published in French in 1961.

education”.³⁶ The work of Du Bois, Fanon, and Woodson offers some of the earliest and most compelling conceptualisations of white supremacy and racism that critical race theory came to reflect, seminal ideas that critiqued western societies’ racial hierarchy, underlined antiBlackness, and analysed what these observations meant for people of Colour globally. In fact, Rabaka posits that “many, if not all, of the key concerns of critical race theory are prefigured in Du Bois’s discourse on race and racism”.³⁷

In the United States, the field of the history of education shifted most markedly in the late 1980s, decades after the rise of Black and Africana Studies, towards beginning to use race as an analytical category with the publication of Anderson’s ground-breaking monograph, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*; it documented the lengths Black southern communities went to generate for themselves, despite sabotage attempts by whites of all stripes, a formal education system.³⁸ Inspired by this pathbreaking scholarship, the work we feature by historians of African American education follows in the Black Studies tradition. Oral history methodology is a crucial source of evidence in these works, allowing its authors to centre Black peoples’ agency and perspectives in humanising ways that complicate their ongoing struggle for educational justice.

Oral history methodology

Often conflated with the oral tradition, oral history differs in that it is generally understood to be “the remembering of events that happened in a particular narrator’s lifetime” while the oral tradition is a way of verbally transmitting hundreds of years of a people’s history down through generations.³⁹ Further distinct, oral history interviews or oral history methodology typically refers to audio and sometimes audio-visual recorded interviews with an individual who witnessed or experienced a specific event or set of events.⁴⁰

The history of oral history has taken several routes. One locates itself in the West during the early twentieth century, when oral historians focused almost exclusively on collecting narratives of elite white men in political and military histories.⁴¹ Another grew out of the 1930s Great Depression Era collection of over 10,000 life story-styled oral history interviews for the New Deal’s Federal Writers Project, a function of the Works Progress Administration (WPA); one of the more well-known outcomes of this project was a collection of 3500 highly contentious slave narratives.⁴² In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars started to use oral history to collect stories from *below*, that is, from individuals facing different or multiple forms of social oppression. This practice

³⁶Theanne Liu, “Ethnic Studies as Antisubordination Education: A Critical Race Theory Approach to Employment Discrimination Remedies,” *Washington University Jurisprudence Review* 11 (2018): 182–3.

³⁷Rabaka, “WEB DuBois’s ‘The Comet,’” 25.

³⁸For a discussion of the significance of Anderson’s book, see Gottesman, “Theory,” 72–4; the monograph referenced is Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*.

³⁹Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 25.

⁴⁰Valerie R. Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

⁴¹Rebecca Sharpless, “The History of Oral History,” in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2007), 9–10.

⁴²Ibid.; Abrams, *Oral History Theory*; Ronald J. Grele, “Oral History as Evidence,” in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2007), 33–91.

signified an important turning point in oral history's use and intention, as the interviews most likely to be deposited in academic archives historically tended to emphasise life stories of influential white men.

Collaboration and co-production between scholars and the communities they interview are important and deeply analysed aspects of oral history methodology, particularly regarding public history and community oral history projects.⁴³ In this essay, however, we focus our discussion on academic norms in the United States that regularly discount these collaborative practices. This approach contrasts the wider practice of public or community history projects, where oral history in racially and ethnically marginalised communities is more openly accepted. Such collaboration in oral history projects tends to be more widely embraced outside the United States, particularly in European countries; in many cases, the United States still privileges the study of history via the dead.⁴⁴

During the amalgamation of human rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, however, historians, activists, and community scholars claimed oral history to meet several converging goals. First, oral histories supplement or sometimes correct the written historical record – a record that heretofore ignored the quotidian experiences of Black people and peoples of Colour, women, non-cisheterosexual, non-wealthy, non-Christian peoples.⁴⁵ Conversely, some community oral history projects aim to collect and preserve previously unheard stories. Lastly, and most often in research, scholars analyse transcripts of previously collected and deposited oral history interviews for new insights about historical events and peoples.

In contrast to critical race theory, historians and historians of education have engaged oral history methodology more regularly in their scholarship. Oral history methodology represents, like critical race theory, a contested site of scholarly debate. This contention reflects the untrustworthiness traditional historians assume present in oral history as a research methodology.⁴⁶ For instance, historians raised issue with the credibility of interviews conducted with formerly enslaved persons decades after enslavement in the aforementioned WPA narratives.⁴⁷ These perspectives, however tentative, deny the merits of these rare insights into enslavement, a topic routinely centred on enslavers' perspectives rather than those whom they enslaved. In esteemed historian of African American women's history Deborah Gray White's monograph *Ar'n't I A Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, the first book-length study of enslaved women, she noted an innovative approach to deftly incorporating these sources.⁴⁸ As expected of oral history methodology, scholars can, as White did, analyse these accounts alongside written documents to enhance rigour or, in some cases, to show, as renowned oral historian Alessandro Portelli did, how written

⁴³Mary Rizzo, "Who Speaks for Baltimore: The Invisibility of Whiteness and the Ethics of Oral History Theater," *Oral History Review* 48, no. 2 (2021): 154–79.

⁴⁴We believe that this is evident in that some of the more foundational texts on oral history theory and methodology are written by scholars outside of the United States. See examples such as Abrams, *Oral History Theory* and Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*.

⁴⁵Grele, "Oral History as Evidence;" Sharpless, "The History of Oral History."

⁴⁶Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*; Yow, *Recording Oral History*.

⁴⁷Donna J. Spindel, "Assessing Memory: Twentieth-Century Slave Narratives Reconsidered," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27, no. 2 (1996): 247–61.

⁴⁸White, *Ar'n't I A Woman*.

documents may misrepresent or render completely inaccurate historical events.⁴⁹ The latter issue becomes more apparent in considering the subjectivity of an author, archival donor, or archivist and the power they exercise in determining what to include and exclude in a given collection. These considerations contest perspectives seeking to discount oral history methodology in a way that rubs against scholarship interested in understanding the past from an African American perspective, which we explore next.⁵⁰

How are critical race theory and oral history methodology aligned?

Critical race theory tenets structure the following discussion of convergences between critical race theory and oral history methodology. To begin each subsection, we discuss their overlap and follow with an analysis of a particular study for exemplification. This analysis is punctuated by a brief discussion of the featured monograph's pertinence to the ongoing critical race theory debate and censorship efforts in the United States. None of the studies we highlight admit to using critical race theory, but, as we show, many historians of African American education adopted its key tenets. We posit this connection as a possibility given the noted research's use of oral history methodology as a racial justice tool.

In essence, these critical race theory principles are not entirely new to the field of the history of education, but their articulation in critical race theory terms offers new perspective on how they can represent mobilised political, epistemic projects different from, for example, the History from Below Project in the 1960s and 1970s in the United Kingdom. This project was expressly concerned with highlighting ordinary people as a departure from traditional political histories that extolled *great white men*.⁵¹ In contrast, the critical race theory propositions we feature have roots outside the field of history and are part of a constellation of concepts that constitute a theory of race, racism, and white supremacy, ideas with global currency. As such, we show how these particular themes can support historians of education in generating knowledge based on the insight of ordinary, racially and ethnically marginalised peoples while considering how doing so characterises a pointed and significant political endeavour.

Rejecting ahistoricism

Because we highlight scholarship on the history of African American education, this entire analysis inherently demonstrates the critical race theory theme of rejecting ahistoricism. Although historians of education rarely use this language, the historiography is certainly parallel to this idea. That is, “critical race theory . . . insists on a contextual/historical analysis [. . . because c]urrent inequalities and social/institutional practice are linked to earlier periods in which the intent and cultural meaning of such practices were clear”; this stance “presumes that racism has

⁴⁹Valarie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*.

⁵⁰Hartman, *Lose Your Mother and Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*.

⁵¹Institute of Historical Research, “History from Below,” *Making History*, May 3, 2022, https://archives.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/themes/history_from_below.html.

contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage along racial lines, including differences in income, imprisonment, health, housing, education, political representation, and military service”.⁵²

The historical nature of the scholarship we feature situates it firmly within this tradition. An illustration further substantiates the point that without naming the critical race theory proposition of rejecting ahistoricism, historians of African American education have espoused it. Education historian, Vanessa Siddle Walker’s body of work makes use of historical ethnography, a methodology

that seeks to delineate a historical period, event, and/or person with attention to time and place but also to infuse meaning into the events through a subaltern lens that elucidates the meaning the period or event held for the person or persons involved.⁵³

In each case, she made use of oral history interviews to either complement, problematise, or clarify written archival records held inside and outside formal academic or state archives. Evidence integral to Walker’s books *Hello Professor* and *The Lost Education of Horace Tate*, for example, came from Black school administrators Ulysses Byas and Horace Tate, who respectively salvaged and maintained records that might have been destroyed upon the collapse of Black professional teaching organisations into white organisations. Both men also served as key interlocutors that provided Walker with new ways of examining existing archival records or secondary accounts. Walker’s re-examinations serve as powerful counternarratives and systemic analyses of both the white supremacist underpinnings of public education in the United States and the ways Black educators and school leaders formed a subsystem of Black education “where leadership, mission, teacher training, and parental involvement converged to support the development of Black schools during segregation”.⁵⁴

In Walker’s first book, *Their Highest Potential*, she well demonstrates how the history of African American education also rejects ahistoricism. This study used oral history methodology and archival research to examine Black segregated education in Caswell County, North Carolina. Centrally, this monograph repudiated the prevailing contention that all Jim Crow era Black schools lacked value or positive qualities. Walker acknowledged that

although black schools were indeed commonly lacking in facilities and funding, some evidence suggests that the environment of the segregated school had affective traits, institutional policies, and community support that helped black children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from white school boards.⁵⁵

This radical departure from the dominant narrative ultimately posited “there was something good within the environment of segregated schools”.⁵⁶

⁵²Mari Matsuda, Charles R. Lawrence, Richard Delgado, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 6.

⁵³Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Hello Professor, A Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 241. Walker’s body of work refers to *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), *Hello Professor: A Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), and *The Lost Education of Horace Tate: Uncovering the Hidden Heroes Who Fought for Justice in Schools* (New York: New Press, 2018).

⁵⁴Walker, *Hello Professor*, x.

⁵⁵Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential*, 3.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 5

Walker's bold rejection of mainstream portrayals of Black schools and communities as deficient offers important context to the current critical race theory debate and concerted efforts to censor such history from the education of students in the United States. These status quo views of Black inadequacy were rooted in ahistorical assumptions about African Americans, views that embolden the white supremacist version of history that anti-critical race theory camps seek to promote. Walker's engagement of oral history methodology helps shed light on, for instance, the deficiencies still assumed present in many Black communities and their detrimental impact on children's academic achievement or parental involvement.⁵⁷ Critical race theory's emphasis on connecting the past to the present elucidates how the past continues to shape the present, and first-hand perspectives from Walker's scholarship are a vital part of such disruptions to ongoing racial inequity in education.

As noted, critical race theory is rooted in legal analyses of the Civil Rights Movement, which identified that such efforts to afford racially marginalised groups basic human rights failed to upend systemic racism. Although the movement saw important gains, African Americans continued to face disproportionate discrimination across virtually all social sectors, a trend one of critical race theory's progenitors Derrick Bell framed as the enduring subordination of Black people in the United States.⁵⁸ Such views illustrate how historical conditions continue to manifest inequity in the present. This historiography grows out of the historical context that created the conditions of and around Black education, critical views of history that follow at least three other critical race theory propositions.

An insistence on interdisciplinarity

While the field of history often bristles at articulating explicit theory in historical works, oral history methodology is rooted in "theoretical underpinnings and its ability to cross disciplinary boundaries".⁵⁹ Oral history methodology, animated by a rich series of sometimes caustic debates during the 1980s and 1990s, is an unapologetic interdisciplinary methodology that derives its theoretical orientation largely from practice.⁶⁰ Such debates parallel those presently unfurling in the United States around critical race theory and educators providing students access to histories that primarily consider the interests of racially and ethnically marginalised groups. "Subjectivity, memory, use of language, structures of narrative, modes of communication, and issues of power and ethics" are foundational tenets of oral history methodology.⁶¹ There are theoretical and ethical considerations infused into how oral historians and the communities often researched and served by oral history projects and oral history-based research construct, carry out, analyse, transcribe, present, and archive or store oral history interviews and projects. Oral historians work with analytical theories and methods from a multitude of fields and disciplines. For example, sociology and anthropology contribute the study of cultures, places, and peoples with

⁵⁷ James-Gallaway, "What Got Them Through."

⁵⁸ Derrick Bell, "Racial Realism," *Connecticut Law Review* 24, no. 2 (1992): 363–79.

⁵⁹ Butchart, "What's Foucault Got to Do with It?" and Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 7.

⁶⁰ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*; Garnet, "Affinity and Interpretation," Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," in *Narrative & Genre: Contests and Types of Communication* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 23–45; and Valerie R. Yow, "Do I Like Them Too Much?" Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice Versa, *Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (1997): 55–79.

⁶¹ Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 7.

interviewing and observations. From literature and linguistics, oral historians borrow ways to construct compelling narratives, and psychology contributes much in the way of memory studies.⁶²

Oral history methodology's interdisciplinarity is evident in its employment across much history of African American education scholarship. Many of these studies demonstrate critical race theory's explicit rejection of objectivity, neutrality, and race-evasion.⁶³ In historians of education drawing on various fields to craft narratives about racially or ethnically marginalised peoples, they often deploy interdisciplinarity as a necessary tool in striving to capture the breadth and depth of such people's lives. These scholars embrace the subjective nature of their work, presenting the racialised perspectives of their narrators in ways that show how their lives were deeply shaped by racial oppression.

Educational histories using oral history methodology have findings with implications across various academic disciplines and fields. In *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965–75*, Joy Ann Williamson conducted a historical case study of the Black Power Movement on the University of Illinois' campus, and its effects on policy and curriculum.⁶⁴ Instead of contributing a top-down approach that positioned big legal rulings and administrative benevolence as the progenitors of educational policy changes in higher education, Williamson used oral history interviews to explore policy changes at the institution as a function of Black student and student of Colour agency, organising, and activism during a highly charged time in both social and educational history. This shift in starting point aligns with the justice aims of both oral history methodology and critical race theory.⁶⁵ By first looking at Black and student-of-Colour actors, Williamson laid bare various institutional and structural facets of university policy and social norms that rendered the small number of Black students and students of Colour invisible and thus immaterial. Her use of oral history methodology facilitated this narrative's display of marginalised students' agency and self-determination in their fight against administrative control.

Harkening to, but not explicitly naming, the critical race theory concept of racial realism, Williamson titled one of her chapters "We Hope for Nothing; We Demand Everything". Bell defines racial realism as "a philosophy or mindset that requires us [African Americans] to acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status" in a country whose very foundation requires the often violent reversal of "peaks of progress" in order to "maintain white dominance".⁶⁶ If African Americans examine their country's systems and structures based on this historical and contemporary reality, Bell argues, they can avoid the inevitable despair that comes with presuming that civil rights gains were permanent while still continuing to challenge oppressive regimes. In this chapter, Williamson shows Black students experienced a severe backlash from university alumni, Illinois citizens, and governing bodies for agitating for basic educational and social equality. Williamson, reaching back to Bell, shows the degree to which white supremacy concedes nothing without a fight or repetitive cycles of protest and gains followed by, as

⁶²Ibid.; Grele, "Oral History as Evidence," and Valerie Janesick, *Oral History for the Qualitative Researcher: Choreographing the Story* (New York: Guildford Press, 2010).

⁶³Matsuda et al., *Words that Wound*.

⁶⁴Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-75* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

⁶⁵Valerie J. Janesick, "Oral History as a Social Justice Project," *Qualitative Report* 12, no. 1 (2007): 111-121 and Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*.

⁶⁶Derrick Bell, "Racial Realism," *Connecticut Law Review* 24, no. 2 (1992): 374.

critical race theory observes, retrenchment.⁶⁷ Although she does not proclaim to situate her study within the racial realist or wider critical race theory tradition, Williamson implicitly engages these frames, drawing on a number of fields and disciplines to do so.

This particular chapter demonstrates the insights the history of African American education offers contemporary events such as student activism on college campuses and attempts to ban so-called critical race theory. These instances of protest continue to animate the ongoing struggle that students of Colour and other socially marginalised groups are waging for representation, dignity, and access in higher education. Perspective on the long history of such fights, and their centrality to the project of higher education in particular, represents a significant historical narrative about which students in the United States may be unable to learn should critical race theory censorship attempts succeed. Williamson's work underscores the importance of student struggle and Black students' historical willingness to lead that charge, ideas and actions that threaten white domination.

Furthermore, historians of education who produce historical scholarship on Black education and use oral history methodology are often and necessarily trained in multiple disciplines or fields. Such interdisciplinarity stands consistent with critical race theory perspectives, which expect scholars to draw from a variety of traditions to produce critical work.⁶⁸ Interdisciplinarity is apparent in Williamson's aforementioned work, which speaks to and draws from educational foundations, higher education policy, educational leadership, and African American Studies. Her study is an alloy of methodological and analytical tools made possible by the fields of anthropology, sociology, history, and Black/Africana Studies. Because multiple disciplines have conspired to minimise or dehumanise Black life as a function of white supremacist institutions such as public education, it is imperative that scholars of African Americans broadly and Black education specifically use all available approaches to counter such reductive scholarship.⁶⁹ This array of tools and perspectives also serve evocative framings of justice.

Advancing race-centric conceptions of justice

As a self-identified qualitative researcher, Valarie Janesick was one of the first scholars to argue explicitly that oral history represents "a social justice project".⁷⁰ Her insight proves instructive to this project, as critical race theory, which "works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of

⁶⁷ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti-Discrimination Law," *Harvard Law Review* 101 (1988): 1331–87.

⁶⁸ Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*.

⁶⁹ The following works note how certain fields or disciplines have worked to minimise African Americans: W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Towards a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1935); Craig S. Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

⁷⁰ Janesick, "Oral History as a Social Justice Project," 111. Recently, other scholars have joined her: see e.g. Thalia M. Mulvihill and Raji Swaminathan, eds., *Oral History and Qualitative Methodologies: Educational Research for Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

ending all forms of oppression” also views social justice as an imperative for those who consider themselves critical race theorists notwithstanding their disciplinary tradition.⁷¹ Stressing this point, Janesick also underlined,

voices and stories of those members of society who are typically disenfranchised and marginalised are included for study and documentation. In that regard, oral history may be seen as a social justice project, moving toward a critical awareness of one another.⁷²

Key to this attack against white supremacy are first-hand accounts of racial oppression from the oppressed.

Oral historians have highlighted that such narratives often come in the form of testimonies. Janesick offered one example of the racial justice promise oral history methodology carries.⁷³ Referring to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa in the 1990s, Janesick underscored, “usually, the abused people . . . have either had their voice diminished or erased prior to the testimony. In fact, some testimony providers had no voice whatsoever in the political or social arena.”⁷⁴ A critical race theory perspective supports this observation, and it goes further to theorise the white supremacist roots of such systemic marginalisation and erasure.⁷⁵ This point is important given the racial dynamics of South Africa and its apartheid regime, which unduly targeted Black South Africans. Historian Clive Glaser drew on testimonies, or oral history interviews, that spoke to a related set of events in South Africa. Specifically, he explored Morris Isaacson High School during apartheid, which was expressly antiBlack. Though his work venerates the tremendous accomplishments of this Soweto school community, these achievements occurred during a hostile, antiBlack period of South African history.⁷⁶ While Glaser gestures to rather than names critical race theory or antiBlackness, his work certainly lends itself to notions central to both, sharpening focus on the role of voicelessness in the Black diaspora, especially in white-ruled societies.

Critical race theory also views such *voicelessness* of the racially oppressed as endemic of a permanently racist society.⁷⁷ Moreover, critical race theory extends Janesick’s claim in emphasising its movement and activist dimensions.⁷⁸ “As a social justice record is kept of stories from participants, most often marginalised in society”, Janesick noted, “the stories become part of the historical record and, thus, the continuity of a society”.⁷⁹ Correcting any society’s historical record to make it more comprehensive reflects an act of justice that lends itself to the larger aims of the critical race theory movement, particularly when those supplements counter dominant narratives about the allegedly innate inferiority of people of Colour.⁸⁰

⁷¹Matsuda et al., *Words That Wound*, 6. See also Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*.

⁷²Valerie J. Janesick, “Oral History Interviewing with Purpose and Critical Awareness,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 464.

⁷³Janesick, “Oral History as a Social Justice Project.”

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 118.

⁷⁵Bell, “Racial Realism.”

⁷⁶Clive Glaser, “Beyond the Syllabus: Morris Isaacson High School’s Struggle for Human Equality Under the Apartheid Education System, 1958–1990,” *Paedagogica Historica* 57, no. 5 (2021) 475–93.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*; Bell, *Faces at the Bottom*.

⁷⁸Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*; Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings, *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education*; Matsuda et al., *Words That Wound*; and Dixon, Rousseau Anderson, and Donnor, *CRT in Education*.

⁷⁹Janesick, “Oral History as a Social Justice Project,” 119.

⁸⁰Derrick A. Bell, “Who’s Afraid of Critical Race Theory,” *University of Illinois Law Review* (1995): 893–910; and ArCasia D. James-Galloway, “Tacit Curriculum of Black Intellectual Ineptitude: Black Girls and Texas School Desegregation Implementation in the 1970s,” *History of Education Review* 51, no. 1 (2021): 81–95.

In *Transforming the Elite*, Michelle Purdy examined the desegregation process of an elite private school, Westminster, in Atlanta, Georgia.⁸¹ This history was informed largely by her interviews with some of the school's first Black students. Of the many racist issues Purdy addressed, one stressed Black students' experience with issues stemming from their hair. The topic of hair represents an important element of Black culture that helps to distinguish Black people from differently racialised peoples. For reasons critical race theorists have explored, Black hair has also been a source of strife for Black people in white societies.⁸² Showing this contention to be the case historically, Purdy explored how former students Michael McBay and Dawn Clark underwent persistent and pointed harassment from their white classmates and those classmates' parents that was both physical and psychological. An extended interview excerpt detailed how white male students amused themselves by putting insect casings into McBay's hair because his kinkier textured afro held tightly on to them.⁸³ Clark, a Black female student, endured similar "criticism and ridicule" for her hair.⁸⁴ Such portrayals clarify how Purdy's use of oral history methodology makes her project serviceable to racial justice. Her analysis depicts how desegregating an elite school proved insufficient to holistically educating the Black students it permitted. She showed that what was necessary but missing in many cases was deeper, institutional change required of a school that had decided to voluntarily desegregate, a move critical race theory views as more self-serving than altruistic.⁸⁵ The racial ideologies in Georgia, even in its urban centre of Atlanta, were rife with antiBlack racial animus with which Westminster's Black students had to contend.⁸⁶ Thus, Purdy demonstrates how policy change alone is inadequate to address deep-seated white supremacy, which critical race theory argues is baked into institutions such as education.⁸⁷ This insufficiency reflects the injustice Black students continued to suffer even after schools desegregated, and having done so implicitly, Purdy's articulation of it embraced critical race theory's race-centric conception of justice.

Purdy's writing across this monograph emphasises that this history of "the third quarter of the twentieth century" is crucial for furthering contemporary discourses about diversity, inclusion, equity – and racial justice.⁸⁸ She notes that the lessons from her book inform "contemporary challenges in meeting the needs of African American students".⁸⁹ Critical race theory views these challenges as normal given the antiBlackness of United States institutions.⁹⁰ Critical race theory also clarifies how Purdy's work speaks to the historical antecedents of these issues, as "DEI" (i.e. diversity, equity, and inclusion) discourse is rampant across United States society, especially in schools. Vivid depictions of such challenges historically were made largely available via Purdy's use of oral history methodology, and critical race theory furthers its relevance to today, particularly with regard to if or how white institutions still struggle to address Black students' cultural needs. These first-hand accounts bolster racial justice in historically considering why "African Americans continue to face dilemmas about schooling

⁸¹ Michelle Purdy, *Transforming the Elite: Black Students and the Desegregation of Private Schools* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

⁸² Paulette M. Caldwell, "A Hair Piece: Perspectives on the Intersection of Race and Gender," *Duke Law Journal* 2 (1991): 365–96.

⁸³ Purdy, *Transforming the Elite*, 114.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸⁵ For a discussion of the interest convergence principle, see Derrick Bell, "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma," *Harvard Law Review* 93 (1980): 518–33.

⁸⁶ Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁸⁷ Ladson-Billings and Tate, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," Dixson, Rousseau Anderson, and Donnor, *CRT in Education*.

⁸⁸ Purdy, *Transforming the Elite*, 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁹⁰ Bell, "Racial Realism."

options and endure gaps in access to equitable public schools”.⁹¹ These longstanding issues represent those pertinent to the current critical race theory debate in the United States, demonstrating the through line reflecting the commonality of these issues throughout American history, a point censorship proponents hope to omit from history curricula.

Promoting counterstories to challenge dominant narratives

Another convergence between critical race theory and oral history methodology is reflective in how both leverage counterstorytelling to elevate the experiential knowledge of oppressed peoples. This move reflects how both speak back to power and expose injustice. As noted, although researchers originally used oral history methodology to highlight elite white men, its turn beginning in the 1960s to the New Social History era started to emphasise *bottom-up* histories of figures previously ignored.⁹² With this change, scholars envisioned the

study of history would become a tool for the reconstruction of the social order, a method of consciousness raising, and that the oral history interview would be both another moment in that consciousness raising and the basis for the articulation of a radical vision among activists.⁹³

Using these tools to challenge the prevailing social order of white supremacy, critical oral historians stood ready to excavate the *bottom* in search of more dynamic, comprehensive, and critical truths about social oppression. This focus parallels one of critical race theory’s foci, which insists on *looking to the bottom* for better understanding of social dynamics and oppression, seeking first-hand accounts from those most expressly impacted by white supremacy.⁹⁴ The critical race theory tradition of *looking* in such a way draws largely on counterstories or counternarratives.⁹⁵ These forms of storytelling aim to elevate the experiential knowledge of oppressed peoples to critique the maldistribution of power and unveil racial injustice. Thus, critical race theory’s privileging of counterstorytelling represents an instructive and incisive form of resistance to oppression and psychic preservation.⁹⁶ Such goals seem to dovetail with those of oral history methodology, as all serve to amplify counter-hegemonic accounts of racial power to illuminate the dominant, or majoritarian, narratives tacitly promoting white supremacy.⁹⁷

⁹¹Purdy, *Transforming the Elite*, 20.

⁹²Grele, “Oral History as Evidence,” and Janesick, “Oral History Interviewing with Purpose.”

⁹³Grele, “Oral History as Evidence,” 39.

⁹⁴Matsuda, “Looking to the Bottom.”

⁹⁵Derrick Bell, *And We are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Reform* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Bell, *Faces at the Bottom*; Richard Delgado, “Storytelling For Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative,” *Michigan Law Review* 87, no. 8 (1989): 2411–41; Daniella A. Cook and Adrienne D. Dixon, “Writing Critical Race Theory and Method: A Composite Counterstory on the Experiences of Black Teachers in New Orleans Post-Katrina,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 26, no. 10 (2013): 1238–58; Matsuda, “Looking to the Bottom;” Solórzano and Yosso, “Critical Race Methodology.”

⁹⁶Bell, *And We are Not Saved*; Bell, *Faces at the Bottom*; Delgado, “Storytelling for Oppositionists;” and Bell, “Who’s Afraid of Critical Race Theory?”

⁹⁷Bell, *And We are Not Saved*; Bell, *Faces at the Bottom*; Delgado, “Storytelling for Oppositionists;” Grele, “Oral History as Evidence;” Janesick, “Oral History Interviewing with Purpose.”

Education historian Dionne Danna's most recent book, *Crossing Desegregated Boundaries*, examines student experiences throughout the long school desegregation implementation process in Chicago, Illinois, in the late 1980s.⁹⁸ Departing from tradition, Danna applied the concept of boundary crossing to support her analysis. Her conceptualisation characterised segregated or racial boundaries as forms of social boundaries, "objectified forms of social differences leading to the unequal distribution of resources" that Black and Latinx students crossed in various ways.⁹⁹ She looked across different racial groups to understand how the inequitable implementation of desegregation affected their experiences and access to high quality education. Through her use of oral history interviews with former Black and Latinx students, Danna challenges the dominant narrative that school desegregation remedied racism in United States schools. Because an impetus for critical race theory was this very observation, this element of Danna's work stands consistent with a critical race theory perspective; without using critical race theory terminology, her monograph took up this particular principle.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, her use of oral history accounts from mostly Black narrators enabled her to discuss, for example, how upon their first meeting, one white driver's education instructor asked a Black female student, Teresa, whether she was in a gang. This rather overt application of an enduring stereotype promoting Black children's allegedly inherent delinquency was common in Chicago and across the nation.¹⁰¹

Beyond their supposed criminality, Danna used another set of interviews to demonstrate the issues Black and Latinx students faced relative to their teachers' impressions of their intellectual abilities.¹⁰² Account after account illustrates the lowly views white teachers held of their Black students' academic aptitude, as other historians of education have observed.¹⁰³ Former Black student Ed, for instance, reported "I was one of the smartest kids from my elementary school, but [my new white teachers] treated me like I was never meant to be there".¹⁰⁴ This brief comment reveals the deeply racist ideologies that prevailed in desegregated schools decades after implementation. Such analyses lend themselves to a dissolution of the "majoritarian achievement gap" story, which purports that the "unequal performance of African American children" after school desegregation was due to the "failure of African American children to perform at the level of their white counterparts".¹⁰⁵ In contrast, the critical race theory counterstory conveyed through Ed's interview reveals that this "failure analysis or deficit perspective is rooted in a belief in white supremacy, produced by adherence to the concepts of white supremacy, and perpetuates the ideology of white supremacy".¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸Dionne Danna, *Crossing Segregated Boundaries: Remembering Chicago School Desegregation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020).

⁹⁹Ibid., 5–6; for definition of social boundaries, see Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, no. 1 (2002): 167–95.

¹⁰⁰Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*; and Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings, *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education*.

¹⁰¹For more on enduring stereotypes, see ArCasia D. James-Gallaway, "Alive and Well: Enduring Stereotypes in Southern School Desegregation," *American Educational History Journal* 46, nos 1/2 (2019): 37–54. See also Tera Eva Agyepong, *The Criminalisation of Black Children: Race, Gender, and Delinquency in Chicago's Juvenile Justice System, 1899–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

¹⁰²Agyepong, *The Criminalisation of Black Children*.

¹⁰³James-Gallaway, "Tacit Curriculum of Black Intellectual Ineptitude."

¹⁰⁴Danna, *Crossing Segregated Boundaries*, 96.

¹⁰⁵Barbara J. Love, "Brown Plus 50 Counter-Storytelling: A Critical Race Theory Analysis of the 'Majoritarian Achievement Gap' Story," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 37, no. 3 (2004), 227.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 243.

Thus, Ed's and Teresa's experiences map onto a much longer history of antiBlack ideologies, which the combination of critical race theory and oral history methodology make more apparent.¹⁰⁷ As another example, *Danns* features testimonies from former students that demonstrate the poor perceptions some held of many of their neighbourhood schools, a belief that informed their decision to attend a different higher-performing high school.¹⁰⁸ These insights reflect the role of residential segregation, particularly in the North and in urban areas, as a historically vital one shaping school quality and options for students of Colour in the United States.¹⁰⁹ Such perspectives help explain why "school desegregation measures opened opportunities for a precious few to escape neighbourhood schools with poor reputations, but they did less to improve the opportunities of those who remained, regardless of their academic potential".¹¹⁰ This observation clarifies that racism was still prevalent in desegregated Chicago high schools. The *bottom-up* perspectives *Danns* marshals comprise oral histories *from the bottom* and constitute critical race theory counterstories in that they seek to uncover disingenuous claims about race-neutrality and debunk them with first-hand accounts of racial oppression.¹¹¹

Residential patterns' impact on education is one of many issues, alongside current resegregation trends, that *Danns*' scholarship speaks to in a more contemporary sense. This analysis reflects this scholarship's relationship to key propositions of critical race theory, a link that helps clarify the racialised nature of these enduring problems and their impact on systemically underserved communities in the past through today. *Danns*' oral history interviews showcase many of the troubling realities of racially marginalised students in Chicago during this era, and their counterstories display the ways historians of African American education may embrace, albeit implicitly, critical race theory themes in their scholarship. The current critical race theory debate may well end with textbooks and educators purposely overlooking, that is, intentionally bypassing, these crucial details of United States history. *Danns*' work brings into view the danger in assuming remedies such as desegregation, or censorship, addressed all racial issues, perils that promise to harm all students' understanding of the significance of history and its ability to both explain our present and foreshadow what is to come should we ignore its lessons.

Leveraging critical race theory and oral history methodology as research tools

The implications of this work are vast. Although we featured histories of African American education, this body of scholarship represents only one from which scholars can draw and contribute in combining critical race theory and oral history methodology. Interested in views of social events and phenomena afforded by participants' experiential knowledge, historians of education focusing on racially or ethnically marginalised perspectives have regularly turned to

¹⁰⁷Dumas, "Against the Dark" and Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.

¹⁰⁸*Danns*, *Crossing Segregated Boundaries*.

¹⁰⁹Examples include Ansley T. Erickson, *Making the Unequal Metropolis: School Desegregation and its Limits* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Dionne *Danns*, *Desegregating Chicago's Public Schools: Policy Implementation, Politics, and Protest, 1965–1985* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Richard Rothstein, *The Colour of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2017); and Taylor, Gillborn, and Ladson-Billings, *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education*.

¹¹⁰*Danns*, *Crossing Segregated Boundaries*, 68.

¹¹¹Matsuda, "Looking to the Bottom," Bell, *And We are Not Saved*; Bell, *Faces at the Bottom*; and Delgado, "Storytelling for Oppositionists."

oral history methodology to unearth and amplify the experiences of systemically overlooked and discounted groups.¹¹² These works include investigations of “ordinary” Black, Latinx, and Asian Americans in education.¹¹³ They typify the possibilities of oral history methodology regarding the experiential knowledge of people of Colour and their struggles against various expressions of oppression. Their focus on racially or ethnically marginalised groups situates these examinations within a racial justice tradition that critical race theory can support while also helping them to influence current educational debates impacting these very communities.

Similar to the recent critical race theory debates, 1993 saw critical race theorist and constitutional law attorney and scholar Lani Guinier “bec[o]me the focus of conservative backlash” when President Bill Clinton “caved into pressure” and withdrew his nomination of her as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.¹¹⁴ Such attacks, as Bell portended, ought to be expected, especially when opposition is seeking to further inequity for Black people.¹¹⁵ In research, however, the opportunity remains for us to underscore that much of the lay conversation about critical race theory misrepresents, ignores, and/or dismisses its foundational literature, which explicates precisely what it is and is not.¹¹⁶ Thus, scholars such as ourselves stand equipped to advance such discourses towards more productive ends – ends we argue must be rooted in critical notions of justice and equity. These fundamental elements are shared between critical race theory and oral history methodology.

Critical race theory represents a cogent body of thought that continues to grow in use and popularity across various subfields of education research, including the history of education.¹¹⁷ While we do not propose that critical race theory is the only theoretical lens historians of African American education can or should employ, we maintain that it proves useful to the history of African American education relative to oral history methodology. What the pairing of critical race theory and oral history methodology offers is an explicit methodological-theoretical coupling that scholars can draw on in support of this wider mission. As such, we invite scholars to contribute similar discussions about other useful theoretical tools that support historians of education’s deeper engagement with theory vis-à-vis oral history methodology. Future directions might also furnish a detailed framework, which was beyond the scope of this essay, enunciating how scholars might engage both critical race theory and oral history methodology in service of racial justice.

¹¹²Delgado, “Storytelling for Oppositionists.”

¹¹³Yoon Pak, Latasha L. Nesbitt, and Suzanne M. Reilly, eds., *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives: Oral Histories of (Mis)Educational Opportunities in Challenging Notions of Academic Achievement* (Urbana: Common Ground Research Networks, 2017); Yoon Pak, *Wherever I Go, I Will Always Be a Loyal American: Schooling Seattle’s Japanese Americans During World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2002); and Eileen H. Tamura, *Americanisation, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity: The Nisei Generation in Hawaii* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

¹¹⁴Isaac Gottesman, *The Critical Turn in Education: From Marxist Critique to Poststructuralist Feminism to Critical Theories of Race* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 124.

¹¹⁵Bell, “Racial Realism.”

¹¹⁶See Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*; and Gloria Ladson-Billings, “Critical Race Theory – What it is Not,” in *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education*, eds. Marvin Lynn and Adrienne Dixson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 56–67.

¹¹⁷For CRT’s boundaries, see Adrienne D. Dixson and Celia Rousseau Anderson. “Where Are We? Critical Race Theory in Education 20 Years Later,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 93, no. 1 (2018): 121–31; for reference to historians of education using CRT, see Gottesman, “Theory,” 73.

Should historians of education whose research centres on race or ethnicity heed our call to more directly integrate theory into their scholarship, their doing so stands to push the history of education into contemporary education research conversations relative to racial equity and justice. These are issues historians of education are well-equipped to inform, yet silos across education subfields continue to curtail more expansive, multidisciplinary discussions. Historians of education have noted that in addition to being an applied field based largely in contemporary needs and policies,

education history is an interdisciplinary field. As educators, we must look for social justice solutions to contemporary educational problems. As historians, it is simply not enough to just tell the story without criticizing the context in which the story is embedded, the crisis of the time, and the positionalities of all actors.¹¹⁸

As historians who are accountable to the field of education, part of our professional responsibility requires engaging with ongoing educational issues, which have deep historical roots in racial or ethnic inequity. Such is crucial because historians of education provide much needed grounding that helps contextualise the contemporary moment. As education researchers who examine contemporary issues continue to engage critical race theory, its use by historians of education could act a bridge between the past and present. This collaboration would allow historical perspectives to inform more directly current – often ahistorically constructed – discussions and research in education. We posit that such cross-fertilisation is where answers to many of the most pressing education questions lie. More must be done to deliberately link traditionally disparate subfields, and the explicit merger of theory and methodology in research represents one opportunity to do so.

Several ongoing oral history projects represent exciting possibilities that highlight the links between historical and contemporary experiences of Black students and educators in the United States, racial justice efforts that draw on several disciplines and fields across the humanities and social sciences. The Teachers in the Movement project at the University of Virginia project, for instance, is building an oral history interview repository of multiracial educators' contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, documenting "how their pedagogy, curricula, and community work were instrumental forms of activism that influenced the movement". One of the central questions this project takes up is "How can recovering teachers' stories inform contemporary teaching and schooling and impact teaching today?"¹¹⁹ In a disparate project, Descendants of Enslaved Communities at UVA, the University of Virginia is also striving to acknowledge the institution's historical relationship to the institution of slavery by finding and interviewing descendants of known enslaved and free Black persons who "labored at the University of Virginia", and to develop a reparations framework that would include providing resources, such as scholarships, for the descendants.¹²⁰ Furthermore, the Amherst Uprising Project memorialises a 2015 protest at Amherst College that began as a sit-in action in solidarity with student activists at the University of Missouri and South African Students' Congress protesting for improved student conditions in colleges and universities across the country and in England. In a set of protests against systemic anti-Black racism, "sexism, homophobia, transphobia,

¹¹⁸James-Gallaway and Ward Randolph, "Critical Race Theory and Education History," 338.

¹¹⁹University of Virginia, "Teachers in the Movement," UVA School of Education and Human Development," July 11, 2022, <https://teachersinthemovement.com>.

¹²⁰University of Virginia, "Descendants of Enslaved Communities at UVA," *Descendants of Enslaved Communities at the University of Virginia*, May 10, 2022, <https://www.descendantsuva.org/>.

xenophobia, antisemitism, ableism, classism and the stigmatization of mental health”,¹²¹ Amherst students ultimately quickened or shaped the creation of various structural initiatives facilitating racial justice on campus. Lastly, the 1856 Project at the University of Maryland, College Park is exploring the university’s relationship to the institution of slavery via oral histories with Black alumni of the institution. This project has captured over 50 stories of Black alumni since the school desegregated in the mid 1950s.¹²² Collectively, these kinds of projects illuminate the oft-omitted voices of Black educators, students, and activists, offering important critiques typically missing from official institutional records and archives.

The global import of this analysis is salient, as our focus on the United States has implications for international Black/African descendent communities. Scholars such as Karen Hulstaert, Maria Luce Sijpenhof, and Glaser have started to explore the international reach of antiBlackness in the history of education, using oral history methodology to exemplify and trouble the enduring stronghold of colonisation and imperialism across, for example, Europe and Africa.¹²³ Sijpenhof’s research on the Netherlands used critical race theory to show many of the same white supremacist patterns of educational violence endured by Black students in United States schools. Although neither Hulstaert nor Glaser name critical race theory or antiBlackness, the implications of their analyses illustrate striking overlap between these frameworks and postcolonial perspectives, which, as Fanon argued, subordinate Black Africans and African-decent peoples while privileging white Europeans.¹²⁴ Hulstaert observed

the belief among some pupils that Congolese literature was nonexistent in the 1960s and 1970s. When more Congolese (or Zairian) authors entered the French curriculum in the 1980s, they were considered to be of less literary value than the French classics.¹²⁵

Our essay adds to this small but growing body of work, supplying a methodological and theoretical analysis to support further examination of the global dimensions of antiBlackness in education and highlighting resistance strategies Black communities enact in struggling against the political, economic, and social domination of white supremacy. More research is needed to better understand these topics and the ways Black and other racially marginalised communities struggle against racial oppression.

In proposing that the compatibility between critical race theory and oral history methodology constitutes a racial justice project, we are arguing for the importance of elevating the perspectives of peoples of Colour who contend with racial subjugation. Such views *from the bottom* illuminate inequities in ways unapparent to those higher up in the social hierarchy.¹²⁶ The serviceability of oral history methodology to this endeavour is difficult to overstate given its instructiveness for gleaning insight from racially oppressed groups according to their views and experiences. Such an approach clarifies their agency and perception long overshadowed

¹²¹ Amherst College, “Oral Histories,” *Amherst Uprising*, May 10, 2022, <https://amherstuprising.org/oralhistory>.

¹²² University of Maryland, “Black Experience at UMD Oral History Project,” *Reparative Oral History Project*, May 10, 2022, roh-umd.info.

¹²³ Karen Hulstaert, “‘French and the School are One’: The Role of French in Postcolonial Congolese Education: Memories of Pupils,” *Paedagogica Historica* 54, no. 6 (2018): 822–36; Sijpenhof, “A Transformation of Racist Discourse?” and Glaser, “Beyond the Syllabus.”

¹²⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

¹²⁵ Hulstaert, “French and the School are One,” 835.

¹²⁶ See Matsuda, “Looking to the Bottom;” Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139–167 and Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Identity Politics, Intersectionality, and Violence Against Women,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–299.

by dominant renderings of historic events. Critical race theory maintains that society will remain unable to progress towards equity if social, economic, and political power remain maldistributed.¹²⁷ These conditions represent forms of racial injustice that prevail in the history African American education, something many of this field's scholars have painstakingly documented often with oral history methodology. Merging critical race theory with oral history methodology stands to elucidate the significance of these ongoing efforts in ways that may promote broader understanding of history's significance, a point undergirding racial justice projects that can facilitate broader social justice efforts.

The blend of oral history methodology and critical race theory is apt for helping scholars identify links between past and present issues in and beyond education. Using critical race theory as an interpretive framework allows for renewed analysis of previously collected oral history interviews; it also aids researchers in using extant oral history interviews to examine and expose structural issues via the experiential knowledge of racially minoritised education stakeholders. This insight is significant because such groups lived through consequential changes to the educational landscape in the past – changes that many racially minoritised groups continue today to witness and endure. These transformations are ongoing and continue to shift in name but not necessarily in function with the political climate.¹²⁸

Oral history methodology and critical race theory share a common history of being challenged and disregarded – if not maligned – within the academy. As noted, both fielded and continue to field accusations of upending the historical project with bottom-up accounts that are often assumed to falsify history – that is, they do not square with uncritically patriotic or nationalistic views of the United States or centre *great white man* historical master-narratives. Both challenge the myth of one objective truth and oppose the idea that the researcher or author can or should remain fully objective. Both oral history methodology and critical race theory exist due to the need for researchers to have the means to question productively and directly whose voice and humanity count. We posit this is a charge historians of education who examine race and ethnicity are well-poised to take up.

Conclusions

In this essay, we have argued that oral history methodology and critical race theory are compatible research tools that work in service of a racial justice project. We demonstrated how the combined use of these approaches reveals that in essence, opponents of so-called critical race theory in public schools in the United States are working to keep out the scholarship of historians of African American education. Our discussion relied on oral history methodology' and critical race theory's shared propositions. The scholarship we highlighted to substantiate our claim is situated primarily in the history of African American education. Featuring specific monographs to demonstrate the areas of convergence between this methodology and this theory, we illustrated some ways extant scholarship has implicitly drawn on both traditions.

Thus, we conclude this essay by issuing a call for scholars to more substantively discuss the theoretical traditions that shape their work, offering critical race theory as one of many options; doing so serves to strengthen, for example, the contributions historians of education can make to ongoing theoretical and methodological debates and discourses. In endeavouring to make more

¹²⁷Crenshaw et al., *Critical Race Theory*; Bell, *Faces at the Bottom*.

¹²⁸Crenshaw, "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment."

plain the justice and equity leanings present in much, if not most, work exploring the history of African American education, scholarly communities within and beyond history and education stand to benefit from an enriched understanding of the contributions this and other groups of Colour persist in making to the nation and an increasingly globalised society.

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