

2020 Proved That What Happens on Campus Does Not Stay on Campus

By Mike Gonzalez

The Las Vegas marketing slogan “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” meant to convey the hope that whatever you did during your stopover in “Sin City” would remain secret to friends and family. Equally, many assumed that the racialized theories that developed in the academy in the 20th century would stay within the cloistered walls of campus.

Neither turned out to be true in real life. The effects of overdoses, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and gambling losses are carried back to Seattle, Albuquerque and Boston, and hurt the lives of your loved ones there. Just as equally, the excesses of Critical Race Theory (CRT) have left the ivory towers and hit the streets of America with a vengeance.

Just witness what happened in America in 2020, when the death of George Floyd led to months of mayhem, caused by individuals whose warped view of their own country had been clearly molded by the teachings of CRT.

The academic James Lindsay traces the point when CRT thinking finally finds expression in the streets of America back to the killing of the African-American 18-year-old Michael Brown in August 2014 by a policeman in Ferguson, Mo.

“Brown’s death mainstreamed Black Lives Matter and, in many respects, many of the core claims and assumptions of critical race theory throughout 2015 and 2016,” [writes](#) Lindsay. “Its fundamental claim was that America was systemically racist and that this could be seen most clearly in the American police, criminal justice, and penal systems ... These beliefs are central to the core assumption of critical race theory that ‘counterstories’ and narratives are more important than facts and truth where systemic racism (and other systemic oppression) is concerned.”

The Black Lives Matter organizations had a direct impact on the violence Americans saw consume their cities in 2020. A September report from the U.S. Crisis Monitor, which has ties to Princeton University, revealed that BLM activists were involved in 95 percent of the riots between June and September for which the identity of the perpetrator was known.

None of this was happenstance. Critical Race Theory may have been an academic set of beliefs, and woolly ones at that, but from the start its practitioners intended for it to have real-life consequences, whether those outside the academy knew it or not.

The Harvard academic Derrick A. Bell, widely recognized as the godfather of CRT because of his pioneer writings in the early 1970s, is very clear in a [1995 essay](#) about what he sees as CRT's purpose. "As I see it, critical race theory recognizes that revolutionizing a culture begins with the radical assessment of it," Bell writes.

This role as the philosophical demolition crew of the traditions and norms of America is a feature that CRT shares with earlier forebears, Critical Legal Theory and Critical Theory.

CLT, the immediate successor of CRT, was more focused on America's legal structure and jurisprudence, which its adherents thought were stacked in favor of the white "oppressor" class and aimed at keeping "oppressed" groups such as women and "people of color" out of power. CLT also added more than a dollop of postmodernist deconstructionism in its analyses of relationships.

Interestingly, both CLT and CRT were founded in the Madison, Wisc. area. CLT has its official founding at the first Conference on Critical Legal Studies, held at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1977. CRT adherents see their start at the First Annual Workshop of Critical Race Theory at St. Benedict's Center in Madison in July 1989,.

As for Critical Theory, its beginnings are much earlier, owing its official start to when the second manifesto of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, also called the Frankfurt School, was published in 1937. The school was inspired by Marxism (as are CLT and CRT) and was indeed an early form of what has come to be called the Western Marxist schools of thought.

From the start, the strong commitment of CRT practitioners to political transformation made it always more likely to jump from the textbook to the street. "It is our hope that scholarly resistance will lay the groundwork for wide-scale resistance. We believe that standards and institutions created by and fortifying white power ought to be resisted," wrote Bell.

The year soon to conclude has been a testament to that.