

# THE FEY ON SCAR

ANTHONY AYCOCK

The race was Terry McAuliffe's to lose. The Democrat was running for governor of Virginia, and he had a number of advantages. For one, he was a known commodity, having been governor from 2014 to 2018. For another, Joe Biden had just won Virginia in the previous year's presidential election by 10 points. This made sense, as the state had been Democrat-leaning for a long time. For instance, no Republican had been elected governor since 2009. Plus, McAuliffe had more money, having outraised his Republican opponent, Glenn Youngkin, by more than \$3 million during the election cycle. Easy victory, right?

Not exactly. On Nov. 3, 2021, Virginians awoke to the news that Youngkin, not McAuliffe, was their next governor.

There are several reasons, of course, and pundits have offered narratives that are as different as *Finnegan's Wake* and *The Cat in the Hat*. One point of agreement, though, is that McAuliffe made a huge mistake in a September debate with Youngkin. After a back-and-forth about parents' concerns over school curricula, McAuliffe said, "I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach."

The backlash was so bad that McAuliffe's campaign ran damage control ads for weeks. It turns out that parents care very much about what their children are being taught. In this case, "care" often means "fear." Conservative parents, especially, are afraid that schools will sully their kids with ideas about religion. About sex. About witchcraft and

cuss words. About breaking dishes so you don't have to dry them, which was why Shel Silverstein's *A Light in the Attic* was once banned in Wisconsin (see Mental Floss' "11 Books That Were Banned for Ridiculous Reasons" by Tasia Bass).

And, oddly, they fear critical race theory. You've heard the term. Donald Trump blasted it. U.S. Senate Republicans said teachers shouldn't be trained in it. Nearly 30 Republican-controlled state legislatures have passed or are considering bills outlawing this thing that has crossed over from the obscurity of academe to right-wing *idée fixe*.

But what exactly *is* critical race theory? How did it get to the forefront of political discussions? And what are the best information sources on it for librarians to recommend?

## ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND

Critical race theory (CRT) is a way of thinking about America's past. Developed by legal scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, it centers on the idea that racism is more than the overt discriminatory acts of select white people; it is baked into the nation's institutions, both public and private. To those scholars, racism is our country's default setting, requiring above-average efforts to eliminate. The following resources offer more background into the theory's origins and application.

### Race, Racism and the Law

Since 1995, the site *Race, Racism and the Law*, founded by University of Dayton law professor Vernillia Randall, has "examine[d] the role of domestic and international law in promoting and/or alleviating racism." It links to hundreds of articles on human rights, law and justice, and other topics, as well as personal essays and a bit of poetry. My favorite section? The 2021 Whitest Law School Report. (Spoiler alert: It's the University of Georgia.)

### Purdue Online Writing Lab

One of the finest writing instruction sites available, the Purdue Online Writing Lab offers an excellent overview of CRT, situating it among other fields such as philosophy, history, sociology, and law. Important terms are defined, common questions are identified, and there is

a list of recommended sources for further research.

### 'The Man Behind Critical Race Theory'

"The Man Behind Critical Race Theory" is *The New Yorker* profile of Derrick Bell, the architect of CRT, who explains how he introduced the theory in his 1970 book *Race, Racism and American Law* and developed it over a decades-long career. Unlike other theorists, who later distance themselves from their early work, Bell never wavered, writing 3 years before his death in 2011 that "the hostility and alienation toward black people continues in forms that frustrate thoughtful blacks and place the country ever closer to its premature demise." (What would he have made of Donald Trump?)

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### The 1619 Project

The 1619 Project, a 2019 collection of articles in *The New York Times Magazine*, which sought "to reframe the country's history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of our national narrative," became the unwitting ground zero for our current CRT battle royal.

## LEGISLATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

CRT leading lights Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic write in their introduction to the third edition of *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, "Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct with it words, stories and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we may hope to contribute

to a better, fairer world." Sounds like a good mission statement, right? Not to some conservatives. What they hear is: All white people are evil, and the U.S. was founded on a lie. It's why they have pushed legislation or other steps to limit how race and racism can be taught in schools. The following resources offer more insight into these legislative and law enforcement acts.

### White House Memorandum

A White House Memorandum is what started it all. In September 2020, Russell Vought, then director of the White House Office of Management and Budget, ordered federal agencies to "cease and desist from using taxpayer dollars to fund ... divisive, un-American propaganda training sessions"—i.e., racial sensitivity training. Taking their cue from President Donald Trump's subsequent remarks, Republican-controlled legislatures, which before couldn't have cared less, suddenly made eliminating any mention of race in schools their top priority.

### 'Why Are States Banning Critical Race Theory?'

The Brookings blog post "Why Are States Banning Critical Race Theory?" goes into detail about the controversy's origin. It summarizes anti-CRT state legislation and discusses the status of each bill. It also links to federal legislation as well as acts and resolutions by local entities such as boards of education or state attorneys general.

### Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack

*Education Week's* Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack tracks challenges to CRT at the state level, and it seems to be more frequently updated than the Brookings post. In addition to a table of legislation, there is a color-coded U.S. map showing which states have passed bills, which are considering them, and which introduced bills that ultimately failed. There is also a link to a video called "What Is Critical Race Theory and Why Are States Banning It?"

## Origins and Background

### LINKS TO THE SOURCE

**Race, Racism and the Law**  
[racism.org](http://racism.org)

**Purdue Online Writing Lab**  
[tinyurl.com/brd2c8tj](https://tinyurl.com/brd2c8tj)

**"The Man Behind Critical Race Theory"**  
[tinyurl.com/ypbecyxk](https://tinyurl.com/ypbecyxk)

**The 1619 Project**  
[tinyurl.com/45h7nteh](https://tinyurl.com/45h7nteh)

## Legislation and Law Enforcement

### LINKS TO THE SOURCE

**White House Memorandum**  
[tinyurl.com/3hzjtmzm](http://tinyurl.com/3hzjtmzm)

**"Why Are States Banning Critical Race Theory?"**  
[tinyurl.com/jprkvzea](http://tinyurl.com/jprkvzea)

**Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack**  
[tinyurl.com/4armkbj5](http://tinyurl.com/4armkbj5)

**US Protest Law Tracker**  
[icnl.org/usprotestlawtracker](http://icnl.org/usprotestlawtracker)

**"Citizen Bane: A Librarian's Primer on Sovereigns"**  
[newsbreaks.infotoday.com/NewsBreaks/Citizen-Bane-A-Librarian-s-Primer-on-Sovereigns-150061.asp](http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/NewsBreaks/Citizen-Bane-A-Librarian-s-Primer-on-Sovereigns-150061.asp)

### US Protest Law Tracker

Yet another site tracking anti-CRT legislation is US Protest Law Tracker from the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. This one combines federal and state efforts and includes in-depth summaries of the bills. You can also see at a glance whether each bill passed or was defeated.

### 'Citizen Bane: A Librarian's Primer on Sovereigns'

The December 2014 issue of the magazine you're reading right now was, depending on your perspective, either the start of something beautiful or the end of all things. Why? It contained my first article for *Information Today!* The article, "Citizen Bane: A Librarian's Primer on Sovereigns," concerned sovereign citizens, a term for people who believe that they can individually decide which laws to follow and which to ignore—and who may respond with violence when challenged. There is some overlap between this worldview and the I-decide-what-my-kids-will-learn mentality of anti-CRTers.

### LIBRARIANSHIP

As curators of public spaces, librarians have a responsibility to make everyone

feel welcome. As purveyors of information, we have a duty to educate ourselves, and others, on matters of social importance. The past few years have uniquely challenged us in both of these roles. The following resources explore the intersection of librarianship with racism, racial awareness, and anti-racist advocacy.

### 'A History of Racism in American Public Libraries'

Yes, yes, we know: Melvil Dewey was a racist. Non-librarians love pointing this out. It's a "gotcha" moment for a profession that is generally free of them. Or so you thought. The Book Riot article "A History of Racism in American Public Libraries" is the fascinating story of how public libraries have fought—and sometimes lost—the battles of equal treatment.

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### Libraries Respond: Black Lives Matter

ALA created Libraries Respond as a space "to help keep current events in conversation with libraries' ongoing work in and commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion." There are pages on topics such as fake news, bullying, immigration, and how to support transgender people. The Black Lives Matter page links to many resources for library programming, staff development, policies and proposals, and more.

Anthony Aycock is the author of *The Accidental Law Librarian* (Information Today, Inc., 2013). He is the director of the North Carolina Legislative Library and an assistant editor for Convention Scene ([conventionscene.com](http://conventionscene.com)). He has a B.A. in English, an M.F.A. in creative writing, an M.L.I.S., and an M.A. in criminal justice. Send your comments about this article to [itletters@infotoday.com](mailto:itletters@infotoday.com) or tweet us (@ITINewsBreaks).

### Disrupting Whiteness in Libraries and Librarianship: A Reading List

Developed by Karla Strand, gender and women's studies librarian at the University of Wisconsin, the bibliography *Disrupting Whiteness in Libraries and Librarianship: A Reading List* is a nuanced and in-depth list of sources "focused on race, racism, and disrupting whiteness and white supremacy in libraries." There is coverage of non-racial minorities too, as in the 2011 article "Paraphilias: The Perversion of Meaning in the Library of Congress Subject Headings."

### 'Critical Race Theory in the LIS Curriculum'

If we want librarians to embrace social justice and to be better advocates for racial equality, we need to train them that way at the outset. "Critical Race Theory in the LIS Curriculum," a chapter from the 2018 book *Re-Envisioning the MLS: Perspectives on the Future of Library and Information Science Education*, purports to do just that.

### Librarianship

#### LINKS TO THE SOURCE

**"A History of Racism in American Public Libraries"**  
[tinyurl.com/3av3s96a](http://tinyurl.com/3av3s96a)

**Libraries Respond: Black Lives Matter**  
[tinyurl.com/axdut7jz](http://tinyurl.com/axdut7jz)

**Disrupting Whiteness in Libraries and Librarianship: A Reading List**  
[tinyurl.com/4kt8ha2u](http://tinyurl.com/4kt8ha2u)

**"Critical Race Theory in the LIS Curriculum"**  
[tinyurl.com/3xz4dxsc](http://tinyurl.com/3xz4dxsc)  
(download required)