



## Courageous Conversations Professional Development Curriculum

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The Courageous Conversations Professional Development Curriculum has grown in popularity in the last several years. Its ostensible goal of pushing back against racism in professional spaces is laudable. However, the approach that it takes to achieve this goal is divisive and radical, and will do more to harm race relations than to improve them.

The problematic elements of the curriculum can be broken down into two broad, overlapping categories, which I have used to organize the following report.

### **The Courageous Conversations Professional Development Curriculum encourages people to view themselves primarily through the lens of race and essentializes people based on their skin color**

The premise of the entire professional development curriculum is that it is preferable for people to be “race conscious” – to treat others differently based on their race – rather than strive to be “colorblind” – to treat others without regard to their skin color. This approach to antiracism is deeply misguided because it falsely assumes that most nonwhite people wish to be treated as representatives of their racial groups and it ignores the fact that people of all racial groups have much more in common – as human beings, as Americans, etc. – than they have differences.

The curriculum focuses particularly on the concept of “white privilege,” which it treats as self-evidently true. In its instruction on this concept, the curriculum essentializes all white people based on the color of their skin and demeans nonwhite people by ascribing certain values and beliefs to “whiteness” or “white culture.” To name just a few examples from the course, participants are made to complete an exercise that supposedly measures their level of white privilege (Pg. 30); they are encouraged to reject “Whiteism” and see themselves as part of the “White collective experience” (Pg.37); they are told that “[t]o dissociate oneself from whiteness by affirming humanness ignores what whiteness has done and how we continue to benefit from it” (Pg.40); they are told that a common characteristic of white people is “white fragility,” which is defined in-part as white people lacking “the skills, perspectives, [and] humility” to cope with “challenges to a white worldview” (Pg.50); and they are presented with a list of “aspects and assumptions of white culture in the United States,” some of which include “be polite,” “avoid conflict, intimacy,” “self-reliance,” “delayed gratification,” “action oriented,” “objective, rational, linear thinking,” “respect authority,” “hard work is the key to success,” “adherence to a rigid time

schedule,” ”Steak and potatoes; ‘bland is best,’” ”Nuclear family (father, mother, 2,3 children) is the ideal social unit,” and ”wife is homemaker and subordinate to husband” (Pg. 61).

### **The Courageous Conversations Professional Development Curriculum requires participants to agree with an ideology that is intolerant, radical, and race-essentialist**

The curriculum materials all appear to be based on or derived from critical race theory. This is made explicit in the “Knowledge” section of the “Systemic Equity Transformation Framework,” which lists “Critical Race Theory: Tenets” as the overarching theme (Pg. 6). It is also clear from the “Selected References” section at the conclusion of the curriculum, which cites self-described critical race theorists such as Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado, as well as scholars whose work relies, in part or in whole, on the critical race theory framework – Robin DiAngelo, Paulo Freire, Peggy McIntosh, Ruth Frankenberg, Janet Helms, Asa Hilliard, Judith Katz, Robert Terry, Paul Kivel, Beverly Daniel-Tatum, and Tim Wise (Pg. 65).

Critical race theory is unequivocally a radical political ideology. In her article “Just What is Critical Race Theory and What’s it Doing in a Nice Field Like Education?” found in the book [\*Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education\*](#), Gloria Ladson-Billings states that “CRT insists on a critique of liberalism,” that, according to CRT, “racism is the normal order of things in US society,” and that CRT is hostile to the notion of “colorblindness” because it “has the perilous effect of rendering White privilege invisible, and thus reinforcing its preeminence.” She goes on to quote another critical race theorist, Kimberly Crenshaw, saying that all critical race theorists are unified in two common interests: “to understand how a ‘regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America’...and to change the bond that exists between law and racial power.” In the same book, Derrick Bell (who, as mentioned, is cited as a resource in the Courageous Conversations curriculum) notes in an article titled “Who’s Afraid of Critical Race Theory?” that critical race theory is controversial “because its commitment to anti-racism goes well beyond civil rights, integration, affirmative action, and other liberal measures,” and that all critical race theorists agree that the “American social order is maintained and perpetuated by racial subordination.” Edward Taylor, in an article titled “The Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education: An Introduction,” also in the same book, writes that a central component of critical race theory is “[c]hallenging Eurocentric epistemology and questioning dominant notions of meritocracy, objectivity, and knowledge...”

While not all of these themes are explicated in the Courageous Conversations curriculum, many of them are clearly the driving influence behind it. For example, the curriculum’s insistence that all white people are complicit in racism and must work to dismantle it is derived from the CRT belief that white supremacy is the defining feature of American society. Similarly, its framing of the colorblind approach to antiracism as a moral defect parallels the CRT idea that colorblindness is a scheme to protect white privilege. The curriculum’s association of values such as “individualism” and “hard work is the key to success” with “white culture” is consistent with CRT’s general opposition to liberalism and its conflation of liberalism with “whiteness” and “white supremacy.” Furthermore, the curriculum’s offering the statement “Racism is over or we’ve made so much progress” as an example in the “stages of avoidance”

of white racism reflects the CRT idea, as articulated by Edward Taylor in his aforementioned article, that “racism is permanent.”

Crucially, there is no indication in the curriculum materials that participants are permitted to dissent from any of its radical ideas. This professional development training apparently presents these ideas as if they were simply the uncontroversial reality of racism in America, with which only a racist would take issue. This makes it highly unlikely for an employee who disagrees with some or all of the ideas in the curriculum to speak their mind, for their doing so risks being labeled as a racist and thus ostracized by their coworkers. Most Americans do not agree with the notion that America is defined primarily by racism, or that things like “delayed gratification” or “quantitative emphasis” are inherently connected to “white culture.” Indeed, many Americans would consider these ideas demeaning to nonwhite people, or even racist. If employees are forced to be subjected to such ideas as part of their professional development training, then they should at least have the freedom to respectfully argue against them.

### **Conclusion**

Employees should never have to fear being coerced into adopting radical political viewpoints, especially during professional development training that is purportedly about fighting racism. Fighting racism is an important goal that the vast majority of Americans support. Professional development trainings on race should draw on this overwhelming support by framing lessons around the traits and values that unite us as human beings – or, put differently, the common human qualities that discredit the racist idea that the worth or aptitude of human beings is determined by the color of our skin. This pro-human approach to diversity training is the lodestar of [FAIR Diversity](#) – a truly inclusive alternative to divisive programs such as Courageous Conversations.