

# LaKeshia N. Myers: White fragility: The essence of America's fear of critical race theory

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A century ago, African American citizens of the Greenwood District of Tulsa, Oklahoma, had their community decimated within the span of eighteen hours. Spurred by a rumor of alleged sexual assault of a white female by a Black teenager in an elevator, the Black neighborhood was under siege by a mob of whites fueled by jealousy and hate. Hours of unending gunfire, arson, looting, and physical violence emerged; while simultaneous dropping of turpentine bombs served as a horrific crescendo.

Among the ashes lay the bodies of Black men, women, and children who had been killed by a deputized white mob and bodies buried en masse in an unmarked grave. The assault on this community may have occurred one-hundred years ago, but its lasting effects have persisted in the hearts, minds, and economic livelihood of survivors and their families for the last five generations. In last week's observance of this heinous event, President Joe Biden echoed the necessity of Americans taking inventory of the role race and race-based violence has played throughout American history. He said, "We can't just choose to learn what we want to know and not what we should know. We should know the good, the bad, everything. That's what great nations do: They come to terms with their dark sides. And we're a great nation."

To be a great nation requires us to take responsibility for the actions of our government and the policies that are at their core, anti-American. This is why I was unnerved to learn that Republican legislators have joined fifteen other states in introducing legislation targeting Critical Race Theory (CRT) and ending diversity and sexual assault training for government employees. For those unfamiliar (which most definitely includes members of the Assembly and Senate GOP), Critical Race Theory refers to the broad social scientific approach to the study of race, racism, and society. Originally coined by attorneys Kimberle Crenshaw and Derrick Bell in the

1980s, CRT's theoretical framework assuages that race, in and of itself, is a social construct derived as a tool of separation. The four main tenets of the theory are based around the following premises:

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- Racism is ordinary, not aberrational.
- Racism serves important purposes.
- Race and races are products of social thought and relations [and] categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient' (Delgado and Stefencic, 2001).
- Intersectionality: 'No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity [...] everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties and allegiances' (Delgado and Stefencic, 2001).

The bills presented by Wisconsin legislators seek to ignore historical truths, under the guise that teaching history and current events accurately would upset students and assault the sensibilities of Caucasian students. This is textbook white fragility—choosing to ignore facts because they make some individuals uncomfortable. Under the proposed legislation, conversations regarding women's suffrage, the transatlantic slave trade, or the Indian Removal Act would be taboo, as they are detailed, factual accounts of history in which white Americans most often were the aggressor. Therefore, instead of being thoroughly examined, it should instead be wiped away and banned from discussion—this is flawed logic.

As Americans, we must begin to tell the unadulterated truth of our country; its triumphs and deficits, as well as its defeats. As we continue to uncover truths about Tulsa and other racially motivated events that have occurred, we must do so with empathy, understanding, and a willingness to shed the biases we have acquired. There is no monolithic American experience. Embracing the uniqueness of all Americans is the first step in changing the narrative surrounding race in our country.

*- Myers, D-Milwaukee, represents the 12th Assembly District.*