

# (Fake) News is Racist

## Mapping Culturally Relevant Approaches to Critical News Literacy Pedagogy

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Article abstract

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# Critical Education

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## *(Fake) News is Racist: Mapping Culturally Relevant Approaches to Critical News Literacy Pedagogy*

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### **Abstract**

*Fake news, while problematic in its own way, is not an anomaly and though intimately connected to the Trump administration, did not begin, nor end, with his administration. Fake news is part of a larger environment of racism in the structure of the news, where stories of People of Color are often skewed in a negative way, positive contributions from People of Color are ignored, and where journalists of color may be sidelined. However, there is a dearth of news literacy curricula that centralizes the stories of People of Color. This is particularly problematic given the ways in which news perpetuates racism. This study utilizes critical media literacy coupled with critical race theory to develop culturally responsive news literacy curricula that centralizes stories about bodies of color as a way to make more comprehensive sense of our news and information media.*



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## Introduction

“Our main policy claim here is that government should engage in cognitive infiltration of the groups that produce conspiracy theories,” wrote Harvard University Law Professors Cass R. Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule (2009). That same year, Sunstein joined President Barack Obama’s administration, where he continued to express concern over the spread of false information (Marantz, 2017). At the time, social media users, including Donald Trump, were amplifying a fake news story that posited Obama’s claim to the presidency was illegitimate because he was born outside of the U.S. (Sawyer, 2021). Known as *birtherism*, the baseless story was rightly chided for its clear appeals to racism (Sawyer, 2021).

Fake news is part of a larger environment of racism in the structure of the news, where stories of People of Color are often skewed in a negative way, positive contributions from People of Color are ignored, and where journalists of color may be sidelined (Heckler & Ronquillo, 2019; Higdon, 2020). While fake news, and racist fake news more specifically, undoubtedly harms the larger population as a whole, racism in news and current events has a particularly deleterious impact on young people (Stoddard, et al., 2021). Young people who are introduced to a racist news environment, without learning about the structure of those racist narratives, may become complicit in perpetuating racism (Cordes & Sabzalian, 2020).

The threat posed by racist fake news may be mitigated by adding a news literacy component to U.S. schooling (Higdon, 2020; Stoddard, et al., 2021). Many states agree, proposing legislation that advocated for media literacy inclusion in K-12 classrooms (Media Literacy Now, 2022). However, the implementation of such curricula has not happened on a large, or sustainable, scale. Although scholars emphasized the link between racism and fake news (Heckler & Ronquillo, 2019; Higdon, 2020), specific language about race and racism in news literacy pedagogy remains scarce.

The absence of such requirements in educational policy is in line with the historical trajectory of U.S. education. Public schooling in the United States has long served to perpetuate racial inequities (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Benson, 2020). The majority of K-12 classrooms in the U.S. are populated by White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020) and taught by White teachers (Tulino, Simmons, & Pitts, 2021). Exploratory research reveals that the same is true in higher education (Higdon, 2017). Research shows that White teachers expect less of their students of color as compared to White students (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2015). Although some U.S. curriculum addresses *racism*, little attention is paid to racial socialization and anti-racism work, known as *racial literacy* (Benson, 2020; Yosso, 2020).

Scholars and practitioners have proposed ways to move U.S. schooling beyond the acknowledgment of racism into active anti-racist work which seeks to help students identify the origin and forms of racism for the purpose of disrupting White supremacy (Kendi, 2019). An anti-racist approach to education necessitates the adoption of a culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Spinelli, 2020). A culturally responsive pedagogy derives from Ladson-Billings’ (1994, 1995, 2014) concept of culturally relevant pedagogy, which supported student achievement by focusing on student learning and success; developing students’ cultural competence and positive self-identity; and fostering students’ critical consciousness and ability to critique societal inequities. Scholars have noted the need for a culturally responsive pedagogy to critical news literacy (Leggett & King-Reilly, 2020).

With its focus on media analysis, critical media literacy (CML) is the space to build and execute culturally responsive curricula focused on news and information. Media literacy work that centralizes the experiences of students of color and focuses on stories of People of Color has focused on media content primarily intended for entertainment (McArthur, 2019; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Paul, 2000; Yosso, 2002). The lack of CML offerings focused on news that centralize stories of People of Color is problematic for numerous reasons, especially because so much fake news perpetuates and helps to solidify racism in the U.S. (Higdon, 2020). As a result, current news literacy curricula run the risk of perpetuating a White bias, in part, because there is an absence of critical work addressing race, racism, and colonialism in news and information media (Leggett & King-Reilly, 2020).

To aid in these efforts, this paper seeks to move the field forward by developing a framework for culturally responsive critical news literacy pedagogy. We, as two White educators, thought it was critically important that we move the field of study in this direction rather than expect our colleagues of color to do it for us. Our decision was influenced by the series of essays in *Education Week* written in response to the murder of George Floyd, which asked White teachers to do the work of self- and student-education as a way to disrupt the tacit acceptance of racism (Barber, 2020). In this article, we focus on pedagogical approaches that centralize Black stories. We recognize that this is but a slice of the narrative of racism, marginalization, and colonialism in the U.S. We commit ourselves to address a broader range of stories and issues in future research.

### **Literature review**

In the U.S., media literacy is broadly understood as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication” (Aufderheide, 1993, p.6). CML adds a critical framework to media education that focuses on interrogating the power of media (Kellner & Share, 2007, 2019). As a pedagogical project, CML is a dialogical process rooted in the Freirean notion of praxis (Kellner & Share, 2019). CML “celebrates positive representations and beneficial aspects of media while challenging problems and negative consequences, recognizing media are never neutral” (CMLCA, 2021). A CML classroom acts as a space where students can re-write, re-construct, or create media through a variety of digital and analog technologies (McArthur, 2019; Yosso, 2002).

News literacy, specifically, operates within the arena of media literacy. Grace and Hone (2019) explain that “news literacy is an umbrella term for efforts to increase the ability of citizens to understand news” (p.3). News refers to an accurate or true account of an event that is shared via spoken, written, print, broadcast, and digital forms of communication (Higdon, 2020). Fake news refers to any false or misleading content presented as true or accurate news (Higdon, 2020). Scholars have noted that some fake news content contains racist messaging (Heckler & Ronquillo, 2019; Higdon, 2020; Russell-Brown, 1998).

Scholars of colonization have noted that People of Color internalize racist messages such as those found in fake news (Cordes & Sabzalian, 2020; Nünning & Nünning, 2015). From the early psychological research that illustrated how Black children saw themselves as less attractive than White children (Clark & Clark, 1939, 1940), through present-day analyses of the negative representations and constructions of racial identities in mass media (Kareem Nittle, 2021; Mulaudzi, 2017), People of Color have been conditioned by media to believe that they are less than worthy (Farrow, 2019; Yosso, 2002)

Critical scholars contend that power relations are not fixed, and liberation from oppressive systems, such as White Supremacy, is possible when dominant ideologies are deconstructed through a process known as decolonization (Hall, Hobson, Lowe, & Willis, 2003; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Kellner & Share, 2019). Decolonization “refers to the shedding of colonial relics inherited from colonial history in all spheres (not only the socio-economic and political), accompanied by an inward-looking, autarkic movement that will lead to the decolonization of mentalities and is tied to economic de-linkage from Western powers” (Zabus, 2007, p.2). Decolonization as a field of study is rooted in the experience of Indigenous peoples (Coulthard, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2012) that is intercultural and relies upon trans-epistemic dialogue (Moyo, 2020). Decolonization is a response to the legacy of colonization which fortifies the settler mentality of empire (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Scholars have defined a colonial mentality as a hegemonic force that results in the colonized internalizing the belief that the culture of their colonizer is more valuable than their own (Nünning, & Nünning, 2015). Indeed, psychologists have found that the adoption of colonial mentalities is associated with mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Paranjpe, 2002; Utsey, Abrams, Opare-Henaku, Bolden, & Williams, 2015). Scholars have long argued that decolonization is a continuous process that can disrupt the colonizing effect of these mentalities (Cordes & Sabzalian, 2020; Darder, 2015; De Leeuw & Hunt, 2018; Lindemann & Nelson, 2001).

Curriculum grounded in CML, especially if it effectively applies CRT by focusing on stories of People of Color and continuously interrogates the ways by which those stories are told, can be culturally responsive to students of color and expand White students’ (mis)understandings of the world around them (Degand, 2020). Stemming from legal studies (Bell, 1980) and applied to education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), CRT seeks to understand the systematic nature of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color by exploring the fundamental patterns of exclusion and privilege that shape U.S. social systems (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). CRT is understood as a social constructionist approach to education that documents institutional racism; critiques dominant ideologies; validates and integrates the experiential knowledge of communities of color; explores the permanence of racism; and provides space for counter-storytelling to operate as a form of resistance to dominant ideologies (Crenshaw, et al 1995; Decuir & Dixson, 2004). Indeed, counter-story telling empowers marginalized and underrepresented individuals to call upon empirical and experiential knowledge in the classroom to discuss their experiences of their experiences of racism and marginalization (Crenshaw, et al 1995; Decuir & Dixson, 2004). CML scholars have applied CRT to narrative film (Yosso, 2002), documentaries (Garcia et al., 2015), music (Paul, 2000), and other forms of popular culture (McArthur, 2019; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005). There remains a need for CRT in critical news literacy pedagogy to engender a culturally responsive news literacy education (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2005).

Just as Degand (2020) applied CRT to CML, we applied CRT to the critical news literacy pedagogy discussed by Higdon (2020). Higdon (2020) argues that effective news literacy pedagogy teaches students critical thinking, journalism, the political economy of news media and digital media platforms, and a history of the producers, themes, and purposes of fake news. We then developed pedagogical strategies based Higdon’s (2020) findings, critical race theory, and a culturally responsive pedagogy framework to develop a culturally relevant critical news literacy pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

## **A Course Outline for Culturally Relevant Critical News Literacy Pedagogy**

The goal of critical news literacy pedagogy is to have classrooms deconstruct and transform the various matrices of oppression that shape media and education institutions. A culturally relevant critical news literacy pedagogy offers a curriculum and pedagogy that draws on these race-based frameworks to untangle the racism embedded in fake news. Given the predominantly White composition of students in communication courses, as well as of the faculty, the centering of race provides space for White people to acknowledge their privilege as they engage in conversations around resistance (Alemán, 2011a, 2011b, 2014, & 2017).

Culturally relevant critical news literacy pedagogy is student-centered, develops students' cultural competence and positive self-identity, and fosters students' critical consciousness and ability to critique societal inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Drawing specifically from CML, culturally relevant news literacy pedagogy explores, analyzes, and investigates concepts of news and makes space to address representations of race and questions of racism and colonialism in news. Finally, there are opportunities for students to create various forms of media. In CML, there is little room for apathy; when a text is not interrogated, audiences tacitly accept its message, which may perpetuate racism. We utilize the process of continuous critical inquiry to zoom in on questions of power and race representation, specifically focused on the media of news and information.

In the following sections, we imagine how this culturally responsive pedagogy may be constructed. We begin with an analysis and deconstruction of news; a discussion of race and racism in news; a specific look at fake news; and close with an opportunity for students to make their own media, putting their analysis to work. For the purposes of this article, we have provided stories (see Tables) that address representations of Black bodies in the news; in future research, we work to expand the structure to include a broader cross-section of race, ethnicity, and representation. Operating under the assumption that racism in the news will not diminish any time soon, we have provided information on particular stories that garnered a great deal of media attention throughout a broad time period; these choices are puzzle pieces that illustrate a larger project and we encourage them to be considered moveable parts that can be swapped in/out, depending on the interests of the class and the face of current events at the time of teaching.

### *Lesson 1: What is journalism?*

Effective news literacy necessitates students developing an understanding of the structure of news and journalism (Higdon, 2020). This begins with an introduction to basic journalism, the codes of ethics that journalistic outlets follow, the use of bias, slant, and framing in reporting, and the different forms of news (spoken, written, print, electronic, and digital). A lesson plan employing culturally relevant news literacy will begin with a brief history on how news is structured: What topic is considered 'worthy' of being developed into a news story? What story might be considered worthy of becoming multiple, ongoing stories and/or needing a deeper investigation? These lessons emphasize that the U.S. Constitution protects journalism because free, vibrant, and diverse journalism is seen as the lifeblood of a democracy.

In order to make these lessons culturally relevant, educators may employ examples of stories and journalists that center on People of Color. This includes historical examples such as the

work of Ida B. Wells, a Black journalist whose 19<sup>th</sup>-century reporting exposed White Americans' practice of lynching people of color (Maloy et.al, 2021). More recently, students and teachers can examine the influential work of Black journalists such as Watkins (2015) and *Coates (2017)*. In addition to journalists of color, it is important to note the historical significance of the field of journalism in shaping Americans' perception of race and racism, as evidenced by the national reports of Emmett Louis Till's 1955 murder (Breed, 1958; Tisdale, 2002). More recent examples include Darnella Frazier, the citizen journalist who inspired a massive wave of multi-racial activism in 2020 after recording and publishing the video of George Floyd's murder (Treisman, 2021). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the history of journalism as a tool of democracy includes a rich and vibrant Black press such as the *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier*, *Jet*, and *Ebony* (Clark, 2014). By centering the important journalism of People of Color, educators are helping to develop students' cultural competence as well as positive ethnic and social identities.

In addition to examining the work of journalists of color, educators may assign students to perform journalism in their community. The creation of media such as news content is a defining feature of media literacy that can empower students to offer stories that counter hegemonic frames from corporate media (Aufderheide, 1993; Delgado, 2013; Kellner & Share, 2019). As a result, educators should introduce students to the components of a journalism article (the headline, the lede, the backup quote, attribution, reaction, the nut graph, background, and ending). Students may be asked to work individually or in groups to collect and vet sources for a news article or broadcast. In the process, teachers may emphasize the importance of journalists not only reporting a story but being familiar with the community. Knowledge of the community in which the story derives helps provide crucial context for news reports (Lowery, 2016). This can be part of a larger discussion about who does and does not report on their community. Rather than just critique news media for failing to have journalists who know their community, the journalism assignment provides students with an opportunity to be the journalist who knows the community.

Students are encouraged to reflect upon their own questions about access to and ownership of news that are geared toward CRT and the complications of the digital age:

- Do you pay regular attention to news/current events? Why/why not?
- Where do you access news (through what medium/technology, and what sources)?
- Who owns the news outlet to which you give your attention?
- In the U.S., the vast majority of mainstream media are private, for-profit businesses; what impact might this have on news organizations and distribution?
- In what ways may fake news benefit/harm a news organization's potential for profit?

With this foundation, the curriculum then turns to question of race and representation in the news.

## *Lesson 2: Race, Racism, and News*

Once students have a grasp on the fundamentals of news and journalism, they are prepared to analyze the news critically. Effective news literacy curriculum explores the complexity of contemporary media without privileging a particular political agenda. This is achieved in part by having student grasp the political economy of the news industry. In the process, they should explore to what extent profit supersedes racist decisions in news media.

Students are introduced to the ways in which the political-economy of some news media perpetuates racism. Students will learn that news media in the U.S. seek to have their content

produce a profit (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 2008; Taibbi, 2019). The fragmentation of audiences resulting from the distribution of cable news in the 1990s, saw news media largely shift their business model from appealing to a national audience for a smaller demographic (Taibbi, 2019). Although they generally seek to attract a wealthier middle class audience, news media such as One America News Network and Fox News Channel seek to attract an older and more conservative and less credentialed audience, while news media such as MSNBC, CNN, and *New York Times* seek to attract a more educated liberal audience (Taibbi, 2019; Higdon, 2020). The resulting content tends to be less comprehensive, providing audiences with what they want to be told including stories that promote fear and anger about a caricature of their ideological opponent (Taibbi, 2019).

Students are given the opportunity to explore the ways in which the political economy of news media shapes coverage of race and racism. Students are reminded that the connection between racism and news is not a recent phenomenon (Blair, 2021; Higdon, 2020). Students are introduced to the ways in which contemporary conservative news media perpetuate racist ideas through false stories such as birtherism; the disproportionate reporting on the criminality of People of Color; and fear mongering about the effects of adding critical race theory to school curriculum (Geonzon & Davison, 2021; Sawyer, 2021; Shah & Yamagami, 2015).

Similarly, effective critical news literacy pedagogy makes students aware of the ways in which liberal leaning news media utilize the veneer of anti-racism to capture audiences and maximize profits with content that narrowly frames People of Color as being ideologically in sync with the Democratic Party. This is achieved by dismissing People of Color who challenge the Democratic Party evidenced by MSNBC contributor Jason Jones claiming that the women of color who supported Bernie Sanders' 2020 campaign were an "island of misfit Black girls" (Essence, 2020). Similarly, students will investigate the ways in which liberal leaning news outlets amplify liberal audiences fear and anger over racism. For example, journalists pointed out that liberal news media portrayed Kyle Rittenhouse, a young man who traveled to BLM rally and shot three individuals, as another racist White person shooting People of Color, but neglected to adequately highlight that the victims were White (Taibbi & Orfalea, 2021). Lastly, students should also explore the phenomenon of 'woke washing' in liberal news media as it relates to race and racism. 'Woke washing' occurs when a person or organization's anti-progressive positions and policies are ignored because they identify as a member or supporter of a marginalized community (Pitcher, 2021). As an example, news media hailed President Joe Biden for selecting a Person of Color, Lloyd Austin, as Secretary of Defense, while ignoring that Austin previously worked for the defense contractor Raytheon, which was connected to a litany of human rights abuses (Turse & Emmons, 2020).

In this lesson, students are encouraged to reflect upon their own questions about and understandings of representations of race and evidence of racism through the following questions:

- Who is/are the subject(s) of the story? Who is telling their story?
- Whose story is being told?
- Based on your assessment of whose story is being told, can you determine whose story is being left out/ignored?
- What word choices and images are connected to race in this story?

Of particular concern in our current news and information environment is the proliferation of fake



news. While fake news has a complicated legacy that extends beyond questions of race and racism, we focus on its intersection with representations of race.

### *Lesson 3: What is fake news?*

In addition to the ideology invested in legacy media, students will explore the production, dissemination, and effects of false content portrayed as legitimate journalism. We draw from Higdon's (2020) study of fake news to organize an approach to news literacy that introduces students to the producers, themes, and effects of this type of news. Fake news may engender a cynicism that serves to disinvite young people from civic engagement; our goal, in contrast, is to teach about fake news as a way to develop a healthy skepticism of news content.

Students are introduced to the producers of fake news: Self-interested actors, nation-states (both foreign and domestic), satirists, political parties, and the professional news media (Higdon, 2020). Part of a culturally responsive pedagogy is including examples that are relatable to the students. Table 1 provides culturally relevant examples of the content generated by each type of fake news producer:

**Table 1**  
Culturally Relevant Examples of Content from Fake News Producers

<b>Fake News Producer</b>	<b>Culturally Relevant Example</b>
Self-interested actors	Racial hoaxes such as Susan Smith, who murdered her children and blamed it on a non-existent black man (Russell-Brown, 1998).
Nation states (both foreign and domestic)	(a) During the Cold War, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) amplified racial discontent with the false story in the U.S. that the U.S. Government infected African Americans with AIDS (Higdon, 2020). (b) In the 1990s, the U.S. Government asked a Black drug dealer, Keith Jackson, to sell drugs in front of the White House so they could arrest him as part of a public relations campaign to promote the necessity of the war on drugs. In the process, it perpetuated the stereotypes of Black criminality (Higdon, 2020).
Satirists	<i>The Onion</i> (2016) article "How To Talk To Your Child About Racism" demonstrates the ways in which fake news can lampoon racist mentalities in privileged communities. This is helpful in spurring discourses about utility and futility of humor when it comes to deconstructing systematic racism.

<b>Fake News Producer</b>	<b>Culturally Relevant Example</b>
Political parties	In 2000, during the Republican Party Presidential primary in South Carolina, George W. Bush's campaign spread the false story that their opponent John McCain had fathered an illegitimate Black child. This fed into the racist attitudes of South Carolinian voters (Higdon, 2020).
The professional news media	During the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, Fox News Channel framed the BLM protesters in Seattle as violent by broadcasting a video of violence in St. Paul, Minnesota and reporting it as occurring in Seattle (Brunner, 2020).

After introducing the fake news producers, educators will discuss the themes found in fake news content: Appeals to nationalism, hate, celebrity gossip, and fear (Higdon, 2020). Educators can use culturally relevant historical examples such as those found in Table 2:

**Table 2**  
Culturally Relevant Examples of Fake News Themes

<b>Fake News Theme</b>	<b>Culturally Relevant Example</b>
<b>Nationalism</b>	Birtherrism
Celebrity gossip	Jussie Smollett, a Black actor who in 2019 committed a racial hoax by purporting to have been nearly murdered and lynched by White men. The presumable goal was to gain more attention to his career (Kenney, 2021). However, in the process, his racial hoax created an often cited example to justify the dismissal of claims of racism.
Fear	Throughout 17 <sup>th</sup> , 18 <sup>th</sup> , and 19 <sup>th</sup> century, Americans spread rumors about slave rebellion plotters that served as justifications for the mass murder of Blacks (Higdon, 2020).
Hate	Dylan Roof's hate for Black people was partially if not fully motivated by online fake news stories perpetuating the centuries old racist trope of black men raping White women (Robles, Horowitz, & Dewan, 2015).

Then, the effects of fake news are manipulation of democracy, marginalization of the press, societal division, moral panic and outrage, radicalization, and the rise of authoritarian regimes (Higdon, 2020). Educators can use culturally relevant historical examples such as those found in Table 3:

**Table 3**  
**Culturally Relevant Examples of Fake News Outcomes**

Effect of Fake News	Culturally Relevant Example
<p>Moral panic:</p> <p>“A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people” (Higdon, 2020, p. 30).</p>	<p>The 2013 moral panic over the “knock-out game” – which accused Black youths of assaulting random Whites to knock them unconscious – was framed by legacy media as evidence off the increased victimhood of Whites. In fact, 50% of the White working class believed they were victims of racism. However violent crime was actually decreasing - 75% from where it was 10 years previous - and White remained five times more likely to be attacked by a White person than a Black person (King, 2015, p.87).</p>
<p>Moral Outrage:</p> <p>“Anger provoked by the perception that a moral standard - usually a standard of fairness or justice - has been violated” (Higdon, 2020, p.69)</p>	<p>During the 1980s and 1990s, a series of baseless generalizations were made about Black women. These included that the women were “welfare queens” meaning that they were living wealthy off of government welfare (Rank, 2015). Similarly, Whites were outraged that Black women were abusing government services so often to attain the drug crack that they were birthing babies addicted to crack (Meyers, 2004). These stereotypes caused a moral outrage about Black women in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century by perpetuating racist and sexist stereotypes.</p>
<p>Marginalization of the press</p>	<p>Trump was famous for marginalizing the press with the fake news epithet which conflated fact based reporting he found inconvenient with false information. He also marginalized the press with overt racism such as shushing a Black reporter for asking what he was doing about systematic racism following the murder of George Floyd (Baragona, 2020); and accusing Black reporter Yamiche Alcindor of being racist for asking Trump if he was being racist (Fritze &amp; D. Jackson, 2018).</p>

<b>Effect of Fake News</b>	<b>Culturally Relevant Example</b>
Societal division	During the 2016 presidential election, online groups were created on the internet for the purpose of scheduling competing rallies by Black Lives Matter and White Supremacists that ultimately clashed on U.S. streets (Higdon, 2020).
Radicalization	Fake news can radicalize users to violence such as Dylan Roof who murdered nine Black people after reading online about White people who were being victimized and sexually assaulted by Black people (Hersher, 2017).
The rise of authoritarian regimes	The Jim Crow South offers a great example for explaining the ways in which fake news, largely through the form of rumors, can serve to maintain systematic racism (Higdon, 2020).

Discussion and reflection components to each section are essential because these invite students to develop a critical consciousness and recognize and critique societal inequalities. Furthermore, they provide students with the opportunity to centralize both themselves as well as their own understandings of race and racism. For students of color, this may be a space where they begin to see themselves beyond the victim/perpetrator binary and may be able to see outside the colonizer/colonized relationship. White students may begin to question their own unearned privilege and see how the legacy of Whiteness and White privilege is perpetuated by the news.

Finally, students hone their digital literacy skills by interrogating the relationship between big-tech and racist fake news. Students are encouraged to interrogate the production processes of digital platforms. This necessitates reflecting on how and why Silicon Valley's economic model – surveillance capitalism - privileges false and misleading content (Higdon, 2020). It is also an opportunity to engage with the politics of representation by discussing how and why algorithms have been found to privilege racist content (Benjamin, 2019; Noble, 2018). This final unit of the lesson makes students aware of how these patterns persist into the digital age.

While this awareness and understanding is valuable, students also deserve a place to apply their news analysis skills. Therefore, teachers and students will work together to talk back to the media through their own productions.

#### *Lesson 4: What You Can Do About It: Talking Back to the Media*

Students and teachers can work together to create analog or digital media productions that talk back to the media such as blog posts, schools newspaper articles, or podcasts. This is a further opportunity for student-centered work. For example, students may choose to use their social media profiles to comment on/about the media discussed. However, some students may be leery of growing their digital footprint or may want to avoid corporate media connections, so may choose to write a letter to the editor or author of an article that particularly struck them. Students may

choose to keep their talk to themselves, wherein they may share a response with their classmates that stays within the classroom walls.

In this lesson, students are encouraged to reflect upon all they have learned thus far about news, racism in news, and how fake news perpetuates racism. The following questions may be considered:

- What do you want to say?
- How do you want to say it?
- Where do you want to say it?

This final lesson provides the opportunity to put their analysis to work through action.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The tackling of news, as a topic, is understood in general terms: comprehension of news and current events is good and fake news is bad for the populace, especially young people. When applied to our current state of news and information, this general understanding reveals a dangerous and conspicuous absence of a culturally relevant approach to representations of People of Color in the news. Students of color in predominantly White classrooms and teachers of color in predominantly White schools should not be solely responsible for teaching their White colleagues and peers about the deleterious effects of repetitive racism in news. White students and White teachers need to understand their own privileges and how the unearned privilege of Whiteness invites apathy than can no longer be ignored.

To do so, we begin with ourselves, as individuals: Those of us who identify as White must first acknowledge our privilege. This begins with learning that we *are* privileged because of the historically contingent racial categorizations and hierarchies that have been established to produce supposedly inferior, racialized others that can be oppressed and subjugated. We need also to explore the intersections of our privilege, including gender, class, ability, sexual orientation, and neurotypical development. We must take on the burden of learning about ourselves, about others, and about our media; we must not pass on that burden. We must do the difficult anti-racist (Kendi, 2019) and anti-colonial (Cordes & Sabzalian, 2020) work.

With its focus on interrogations of power, CML is primed to implement anti-racist and anti-colonial work. The most logical way to tackle racism in news is through CML, with its attention to both representation in, and organization of, media as systems of power. CML scholars can support K-12 and higher education teachers through developing curricula that addresses racism in media and providing resources and support for teachers to execute these lessons in their classrooms. Future research needs to be conducted to provide student based evidence, assessment, and reflection of the efficacy of our proposed pedagogical model.

Our goal is not to add *more* work to current teachers' agendas. Instead, we argue the development of culturally relevant pedagogy should be infused in pre-service teacher education. These lessons and curricular planning mean next to nothing if teachers are not trained in how best to learn, prepare, and bring these culturally responsive lessons to their classrooms. Colleges of education must look adapt their curricular offerings to support pre-service teachers in bringing CML to teacher education (Butler, 2020).

The above frame begins this process of change while acknowledging that there is much more work to be done. For the purposes of this article, we have focused the course outline specifically on topics related to Black people in the U.S. We are consciously aware that we have left out news stories that address other racial or ethnic groups. We are committed to future scholarship that builds upon this curriculum with a greater range of exploration across other racialized groups, genders, ethnicities, abilities, and corresponding sociopolitical intersections, such as how climate change disproportionately negatively impacts poor bodies of color, especially Indigenous populations.

Using the above topics as examples, we can also examine where ‘news’ is taught and how to potentially re-imagine the location of studies of news. At the college level, ‘news’ may be taught in journalism classes, yet not all students will be journalism majors or take journalism courses. At the K-12 level, ‘news’ may be addressed via the school newspaper (which may be a class, or may be an extracurricular activity), or may be worked into English or Social Studies courses. Furthermore, at the K-12 level, ‘the news’ is often alienating to young people who see it as the provenance of adults and are not particularly concerned with their interests (Buckingham, 2000). If ‘news,’ or attention to current events, is deemed important (itself a needed conversation) then why not open up the topic of news to *all* subject matters? A robust news curriculum would be justifiable in a range of K-12 and college courses, including but not limited to the hard sciences, history, and social studies. For example, discussions of climate change are both news (in terms of current events) as well as science (in terms of understanding the Earth and changes as a result of human actions), and who is impacted most by climate change (which is intimately connected to race and racism). Therefore, we also encourage a curricular intersection between topics, especially those that are relevant to young people’s lives and interests.

A culturally responsive critical news literacy classroom includes opportunities for students to engage in story-telling and counter-storytelling. Students are invited to explore their news habits, investigate the origins of the content they encounter, and document their experience with journalists of color. Through both analysis and action, students may see themselves and their classmates in new and different ways.

A culturally responsive news literacy curriculum addresses both fake news as well as the structure of news. Including both is crucial because too often the fixation is on fake news as the only problem, rather than deeper questions about why and how the racist structures of U.S. society create an environment for racist fake news to be produced, spread, and legitimized.

With this piece, we begin the conversation: What we cover here is no more or less important than what we have left out – indeed, what has been left out of news analysis lessons for decades – and needs greater attention.

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