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Reclaiming Our Histories, Recovering Community Cultural Wealth

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Critical race theory (CRT) is a dynamic interdisciplinary framework used to identify, analyze, and challenge the ways race and racism intersect with multiple forms of subordination to shape the experiences of People of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Informed by critical community and academic traditions naming race as a social construction, scholars have applied CRT to the field of education to closely examine and change the very real social consequences of racism within and beyond schools (e.g. Zamudio, et al., 2011; Parker & Stovall, 2004). Collectively, this work has taken up Richard Delgado’s (2003) challenge to “consider that race is not merely a matter for abstract analysis, but for struggle. It should expressly address the personal dimensions of that struggle and what they mean for intellectuals” (pp. 151-152). In this brief, we focus on the naming an array of knowledges, skills abilities, and networks of communities of color “not merely for abstract analysis,” but as a part of the larger struggle to survive and resist racism.

OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

The question posed in Tara J. Yosso’s 2005 *Whose Culture Has Capital* article positioned the ways of knowing and being of Communities of Color as sites of urgent struggle. Mari Matsuda (1989), encouraged scholars to engage in this struggle as a conscious effort “to know history from the bottom,” and careful consideration of “sources often ignored: journals, poems, oral histories, and stories from their own experiences of life in a hierarchically arranged world” (pp. 2323–24). Only by listening to those “faces at the bottom of society’s well,” as Derrick Bell (1992) described, would we recover forms of knowledge long misrepresented and misunderstood, and “learn from those whom we would teach” (p. 198). There, in the margins, we name community cultural wealth as an array of knowledges, skills, abilities, and networks possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression.¹

Scholars have astutely outlined the origins and evolution of deficit thinking as foundational to the project of racism and colonialism (e.g. Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). Community cultural wealth takes

particular aim at deficit interpretations of Pierre Bourdieu and cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu argued that social hierarchy is not reproduced by chance, but rather that those in power (elite Whites) restrict access to the forms of knowledge and networks, or the forms of capital they acquired through their family and/or through formal schooling. He exposes the means by which dominant groups within society maintain power—by limiting access to acquire and utilize very specific forms of cultural, social, and economic capital. Through a deficit lens, however, Bourdieu’s critique of how hierarchy reproduces itself is utilized as a ‘how-to’ model, wherein Students of Color need to acquire the appropriate cultural capital or social capital to achieve academically.

DISCUSSION

CRT pushes us to “see” Communities of Color in a critical historical light. Examining the lived experiences of Communities of Color through CRT as our primary lens, we can see at least six dynamic and overlapping forms of capital. This interplay of cultural assets

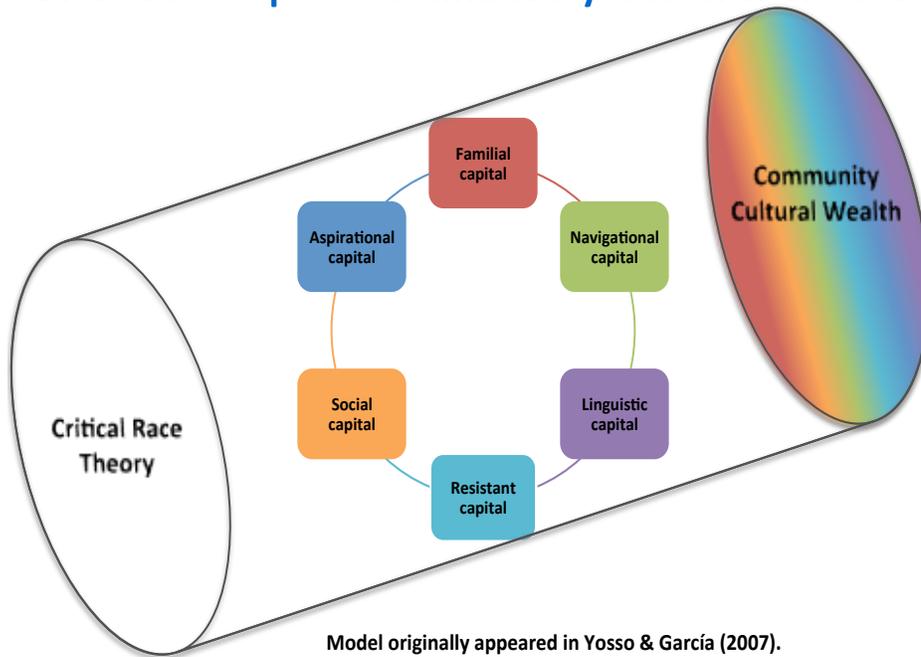
and resources illuminates a multifaceted view of community cultural wealth:

- *Aspirational capital* refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.
- *Linguistic capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication in multiple languages and/or language styles (including communication through art, music, poetry, theatre, and dance).
- *Social capital* can be understood as networks of people and community resources.
- *Navigational capital* refers to skills in maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this implies the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind.
- *Familial capital* refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition.

- *Resistant capital* refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality.

Each of the forms of capital within the kaleidoscope, and their multifaceted dimensions builds on an extensive body of critical social science research that has consistently reframed culture as a resource for Communities of Color, rather than as a detriment (e.g. Asante, 1991; Gómez-Quíñones, 1977; Grande, 2004; Kelley, 1997; Trueba & Delgado-Gaitan, 1988). It is only through ethical approaches to listening and learning about strengths that the kaleidoscope can help us document how these knowledges have been preserved and passed down – often in difficult circumstances including violence, threats, humiliations, and unjust laws. As we consider the generations of communities who have preserved and passed down cultural wealth despite harsh conditions, let us be fierce visionaries for generating opportunities to cultivate community cultural wealth as a tool of reclamation – a tool for social justice.²

A Kaleidoscope of Community Cultural Wealth



CONSIDERING OUR PAST AS A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

For those generations currently struggling through the educational pipeline and those who have yet to arrive, we urgently need a more in-depth historical analysis of community cultural wealth. Establishing archival collections and creatively making these histories more publicly accessible contributes to the preservation of precious community memory. We appreciate Kris Gutiérrez's (2016) call for researchers to employ "a sociocultural imagination, with an expansive understanding of how people can learn resonantly, as they

live together productively and interculturally" (p. 188). She illustrates this approach by looking to her own past and considering the ways a predominately Mexican American mining town in Arizona generated a "grammar of hope, possibility, and resilience" (p. 188). There, Gutiérrez finds "despite the segregation, and institutional attempts to transform difference into deficit, the community, its people, and practices were resilient in ways that would not be evident from focusing solely on the actions of those in power" (p. 189). To foster such a critical historical perspective of our present material conditions, we must

shift the research lens not only away from those people with power, but away from deficit-laden definitions and 'how-to' models of acquiring and enacting power. We must also recommit ourselves to praxis—action that is theoretically *and* historically grounded. Indeed, by recovering ancient traditions of passing on cultural knowledge, in spite of and to spite efforts of historical erasure, we do more than honor the brilliant ingenuity of those who employed community cultural wealth in spaces, places, programs, and action-research agendas—we re-write our place in history and re-inscribe our place in building the future.³

NOTES

Dedicated to Dr. Ernesto Galarza, who utilized a full array of cultural knowledges, skills, abilities, and networks in his fierce advocacy of Mexican laborers and their children in the United States.

¹ bell hooks (1990) encourages us to embrace the margin as a site of resistance, asserting, "Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a 'safe' place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance (p. 149).

² Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) reminds us that "Change requires more than words on a page—it takes perseverance, creative ingenuity and acts of love" (p. 574).

³We are inspired here also by Natalia Molina's (2015) analysis of the ways gentrification erases cultural knowledges previously shared in particular places. In her examination of her childhood neighborhood of Echo Park, California, she finds restaurants functioning as empowering "social spaces" cultivated by the efforts of "place-makers who leave a mark on the urban landscape for generations to come" (p. 3).

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