ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Ignorance of critical race theory predicts White Americans' opposition to it

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Abstract

Acknowledging systemic racism, a key tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT), may be threatening to many Americans but it can also reduce racial biases. However, anti-CRT legislation prohibits learning about racism, thus highlighting the mutually reinforcing relationship between systemic racism and the production of ignorance. We assessed White Americans' knowledge about CRT through participant-generated definitions (Study 1, $N = 199$) and via a true/false questionnaire (Study 2, $N = 194$), and its relation to opposition to CRT. Opposition to CRT was associated with a less accurate understanding of CRT, even when controlling for political orientation. Content analyses revealed that opponents of CRT deny anti-Black racism, believe CRT harms Whites, and view discussing race as divisive. Based on these themes, we developed a meta-cognitive corrective intervention in Study 3 ($N = 289$). Participants who received corrective feedback after taking a multiple-choice test about CRT showed a larger decrease in their opposition to CRT than those in the control condition.

INTRODUCTION

How did a relatively obscure legal theory gain national prominence and motivate calls for teaching bans? Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines how racism shapes society; one main tenet of CRT is the existence of systemic racism, which describes how various legal, political, educational, and

economic systems conjointly operate to create racial inequality (Braveman et al., 2022; Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Because the acknowledgment of systemic bias calls into question the validity of existing social structures, efforts to address this problem threaten those who benefit from the status quo (Blodorn et al., 2012; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). In response, those who feel threatened by the idea of systemic racism may seek to undermine the legitimacy of such claims by denying the existence of racism and racial inequity and by intentionally perpetrating ignorance and misinformation toward that end. This creates a symbiotic dynamic between systemic racism and the production of ignorance. In our effort to make sense of these patterns, we examined predictors of opposition to CRT among White Americans.[1] Our analyses are grounded in Critical Race Psychology (CRP) (Salter & Adams, 2013) and the recognition of *epistemologies of ignorance* (see Bonam et al., 2019; Mills, 2007; Nelson et al., 2013; Outlaw, 2007). Specifically, in this article, we argue that White Americans' opposition to CRT is rooted in ignorance of CRT fundamentals.

Socio-political context

In the United States (U.S.), the past decade has been characterized by social and political disorder and division. In the past few years, a few pivotal events brought a heightened public awareness of racial inequities. In 2019, the New York Times launched the "1619 Project," a journalistic contribution to public discourse that reframed American history by focusing on the contributions of African Americans through a set of essays marking the 400th anniversary of the first enslaved people of African descent being forcibly brought to the American continent (Hannah-Jones et al., 2019). This project gained attention against a backdrop of growing awareness of the toll of police brutality on African Americans due to the efforts of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. It hit a high point in the summer of 2020; there was a severe uptick in civil unrest and protests in response to the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others by law enforcement (Elling-wood, 2021). These events sparked national concern and attention to racial injustice and inequality amongst the public. During the summer of 2020, half of USA Today's top 10 bestsellers contained antiracist literature like, *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo and *How to be an Anti-Racist* by Ibram Kendi (Van Denburgh, 2020). Americans were beginning to acknowledge and confront how past and present practices contribute to current racial inequality.

To some White Americans, the recognition of racism felt like a revelation, but others were threatened by the very recognition of social inequality. As public discussions of racism increased, backlash ensued. Based on polls conducted by Civiqs, an online polling and data analytic company, support for the BLM movement dropped almost as quickly as it had risen; the patterns of support also revealed a deepening partisan divide as Democrats reported greater support for the BLM movement than did Republicans (Bellamy, 2021). Politicians' statements turned from apologies and acknowledgment of the widespread and persistent trauma of police brutality on African American lives into invectives against protestors and the risk of damage to commercial property (Toosi et al., 2021). In September 2020, Christopher Rufo, a conservative activist, appeared on a popular conservative talk show in which he singled out CRT as a "destructive, divisive, pseudoscientific ideology" (Wallace-Wells, 2021, para. 8). Then-president Trump issued an executive order

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[1] We capitalize the words Black and White when writing about racial/ethnic groups to visually differentiate the social categories from color words like black, green, white, and so forth. We use the words Black and African American interchangeably and the word White to denote all those who are racialized as such by society's application of racial categories to the spectrum of diversity represented by the human race.

to ban diversity training and other "divisive concepts" (Block, 2020) as well as created the 1776 Commission to develop educational materials deemed by political conservatives as more patriotic than the 1619 Project. In this period, CRT entered public awareness as a shorthand way to describe all efforts to discuss, describe, and educate the public about systemic racism, diversity, and racial equity.

The recent onslaught of bans and protests against CRT among the American public can be understood through a psychological lens. As originally conceptualized by legal scholars, CRT aims to recognize how structural and legal systems create, maintain, and promote racial inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). As noted above, a foundational principle of CRT is a recognition of the ways in which racism is not just interpersonal in nature, but rather, a systemic force embedded in American society that shapes individuals' outcomes (for a review of the literature, see Crenshaw, 2011). Psychological research on perceptions of racial inequality reveals that White people are significantly more likely to acknowledge isolated, individual incidents of racism than systemic forms (Nelson et al., 2013; Bonam et al., 2019). The principles of CRT, in and of themselves, call for an acknowledgment of the role racism plays across multiple levels of power. This may be perceived as particularly problematic for predominantly White institutions that govern the U.S. legal system; for instance, Jost and Major (2001) illustrated how members of powerful groups tend to resist acknowledging the illegitimacy of their power.

CRT was targeted extensively in political discourse, leading to legislation proposed to ban it, and in many cases, approved into law. In the past few years, over 44 states have explored anti-CRT legislation and 18 states have passed such restrictions (Ray & Gibbons, 2021; Shwartz, 2022). In an assessment of anti-CRT legislation, the Brookings Institution reported that many of these legal proposals do not explicitly use the phrase "Critical Race Theory" (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). Instead, most bans restrict discussions about racism within the U.S. and its systems (prisons, government, legal, etc.) as well as lessons on conscious/unconscious bias, racial privilege, discrimination, and oppression. Government agencies and universities felt the effects of these legislative actions (Golden, 2023; Inside Edition, 2023), but many of the proposals targeted local school boards, allowing states to withhold funds and issue fines to individuals, schools, or districts that violate these restrictions (Alexander et al., 2022). Opposition to CRT became a rallying cry among White parents, supported by organizations that have launched campaigns to remove teachers, administrators, and school board members who wanted to engage with the issues of diversity—even when the educator in question was not utilizing or even familiar with CRT (e.g., Carr, 2022). As such, responses to CRT have reflected a broadening set of associations with the term combined with a lack of understanding of its origins and implications.

In taking an approach reflective of CRP, we start by addressing the role that systems of knowledge and ignorance play in producing this situation, and then focus on individually held ideologies that might further shape responses. Many of the theory's opponents have spoken out about its anti-American rhetoric and potential to further racial divides (Corbett, 2022). Additionally, many opponents of CRT state that the theory encourages people to focus on skin color instead of individual merit, which contradicts widely held colorblind ideologies (Parry, 2021). An analysis of recent news clips and videos revealed that opposition towards CRT was framed in reference to White Americans and the discomfort it may evoke for *them* (Sambaraju, 2024). For instance, North Carolina congress person Rep. Dan Bishop told his constituents that, "critical race theory is a divisive ideology that threatens to poison the American psyche. For the sake of our children's future, we must stop this effort to cancel the truth of our founding and our country" (Adams, 2021, para. 4). This highlights how opposition towards CRT echoes experiences of threat by the dominant group, downplays or ignores the experience of minority group members, neglects evidence about

the benefits of a comprehensive education for all children, and reflects ideologies of neoliberal individualism that hinder acknowledgment of racial injustice (Salter & Adams, 2013).

Systemic production of ignorance

The rise in anti-CRT legislation is not just about White people feeling personally threatened, but about intentional efforts to prevent learning about systemic racism. This is what Outlaw (2007) referred to as the systematic (re)production of ignorance. Education that conveys the impact of systemic racism in legal structures and institutions to a sizable proportion of the public carries with it a threat to the status quo. As such, it is met with resistance, particularly from those who wish to preserve existing power structures. Furthermore, the social and political aspects of maintaining a system that intentionally produces ignorance are explored by the sociology of ignorance, as introduced by Mueller (2018). Mueller notes that the lack of widespread knowledge about systemic racism is socially constructed and serves as a way for those in power to deny inequity and avoid responsibility for redressing wrongs while maintaining their position in the social hierarchy resulting in collective ignorance.

Without knowledge of historical and systemic racism, people are less able to recognize contemporary systemic (and to a lesser extent, isolated) manifestations of racism. Notably, research on the Marley Hypothesis (e.g., Nelson et al., 2013) demonstrates that racial disparities in knowledge of critical racial history leads to divergent perceptions of race relations. Named after the late musician Bob Marley, the theory proposes that one's level of historical knowledge of past discrimination impacts current understanding of discrimination. In support of the Marley Hypothesis, White American college students demonstrate less awareness of critical Black history compared to Black American students, and thus are less likely to recognize racism in systemic and isolated events (Bonam et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2013). Among White people, Democrats report more accurate knowledge of critical racial history than Republicans, which in turn predicts greater acknowledgment of systemic, as well as isolated, forms of prejudice (Zell & Lesick, 2022).

Structures and systems are created and maintained to reinforce racial disparities in knowledge of American history, evidenced by Black History Month displays in high schools. Salter and Adams (2016) found that Black-majority high schools were more likely to create displays explicitly describing the harms of racism. On the other hand, majority-White high schools tended to have celebratory displays focusing on key heroic figures in Black history, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, with less attention paid to the racist context in which those individuals lived or the more recent manifestations of systemic racial bias. In a follow-up study, the two types of displays were shown to a new group of predominantly White college students. White students who saw the displays from the Black-majority schools were better able to recognize racism and expressed more support for anti-racist policies (Salter & Adams, 2016). In a different study examining how psychology courses teach racism, Adams et al. (2008) found that college students who learned about racism merely as an isolated, interpersonal phenomenon (the standard portrayal) compared to those who experienced a lesson which acknowledged institutional and structural forms of racism (the expanded portrayal) were less likely to recognize racism in its systemic forms or to endorse antiracist policies. In sum, significant evidence suggests that existing structures of knowledge diffusion can systematically contribute to misunderstanding and under-acknowledgment of racism.

Knowledge as liberation

Teaching about historical forms of racism, in contrast, increases awareness and reduces racial inequality and bias. Bonam et al. (2019) used an educational intervention, which exposed White participants to the critical history of U.S. housing policies that were designed to block Black home-ownership while allowing White households to build intergenerational wealth through property ownership (*red lining*). After this brief lesson, participants were better at recognizing manifestations of systemic racism compared to the control group. Fang and White (2022) also investigated how historical information impacts beliefs about racial inequality. Across two studies, exposure to information highlighting the historical and structural roots of racial inequality increased the recognition of racial inequality and decreased racial resentment among White conservatives. Additionally, Burns and Granz (2021) reduced racial bias and increased sympathy towards Black people among White Americans when past racial injustice was framed as recent rather than far in the past. Knowledge of past racial history, thus, influences the perceptions and attitudes of Americans about the present day.

Collectively, these studies outline the critical role that education plays in reducing systemic and individual racial bias and offer an as-yet-untested possibility for addressing negative attitudes towards Critical Race Theory. This is especially timely, given that efforts to increase discussion on race and educate the public have been met with a slew of anti-CRT legislation surrounded by misleading or blatantly incorrect information. For example, in order to prevent people from understanding the fullness of systemic racism, efforts have been orchestrated to deny its existence while demonizing educational efforts that elucidate the effects of systemic racism (e.g., Block, 2020; Carr, 2022; Golden, 2023). These efforts perpetuate ignorance that prevents a full understanding of the systems in place. The structural elements that prevent the diffusion of knowledge, such as curriculum restrictions and book bans (e.g., Friedman, 2022), work in conjunction with ideologies that function at the individual psychological level, as outlined below. Together, these prevent individuals from addressing inequality effectively, both on an interpersonal level and on a societal level.

Ideological motivations to avoid acknowledging racism

Colorblindness as a racial ideology

Efforts to minimize discussions related to race and racism echo the values of colorblind ideology, which posits that racial equality can be achieved by ignoring group distinctions and valuing individualism (Apfelbaum et al., 2008, 2012). Colorblindness is a racial ideology that may be embraced for different reasons (Babbitt et al., 2016). Although some notions of colorblindness were originally articulated to advance equality efforts, studies have shown that ignoring race is detrimental to combating racial inequality. An experiment conducted by Richeson and Nussbaum (2004) showed that White participants who had been primed with colorblindness showed more implicit and explicit preference for White Americans as compared to Black Americans. In an explicit look at attitudes toward intergroup equality, Knowles et al. (2009) found evidence that colorblind ideology was used as a means to maintain the status quo for racial inequality among White Americans. Specifically, the endorsement of colorblind ideology was related to *social dominance orientation* (support for a social hierarchy where some groups dominate others; Pratto et al., 1994), as well as with conservative political orientation, which we explore further below (Burke, 2017).

Colorblindness, at its core, ignores and denies the importance of racial identities, concealing how race impacts how one moves within society. Despite this omission, many American antidiscrimination laws and practices were built on a colorblind ideal (Haney-López, 2007). One reason for this may be the psychological difficulty posed by grappling with transgressions by in-group members (Rotella & Richeson, 2013). Research on motivated forgetting demonstrates that Americans who received information about historical atrocities their in-group had committed were less likely to remember that information compared to when the same acts were described as committed by an out-group. In an attempt to bypass the threat associated with acknowledging one's own role in a racist system, individuals tend to ignore, forget, or deny instances of racism (Knowles et al., 2014; Rotella & Richeson, 2013).

Racial bias

The way that participants feel about White and Black people—their levels of racial bias—may also be an underlying motivation which determines opposition to CRT, such that more negative attitudes toward Black people could predict less support for CRT. Unlike the colorblindness ideology addressed above, racial bias requires acknowledging racial categories. A recent discursive analysis, which analyzed video clips from news media about anti-CRT legislation, found that concerns about potential harm to White children and White Americans were often used to oppose CRT (Sambaraju, 2024). Therefore, individuals' opinions about CRT may reflect how warmly they feel toward Black and White Americans and their perceptions of the consequences of CRT for each group. Building on the prevalent belief that supporting Black people's rights implies oppressing White people (Wilkins et al., 2015), the anti-CRT push has employed concerns about White people being made uncomfortable as a justification to avoid the topic of systemic racism. Those who are racially biased against Black people are more likely to prioritize White comfort over reducing harm to Black individuals, families, and communities.

Racial group identification

Another related motivation that affects responses to CRT is the strength of one's identification with their racial group (e.g., White identification). Social identity theory suggests that the extent to which one's group membership is central to their sense of self-concept (i.e., group identification) influences their perceptions and behaviors (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Turner et al., 1987). Individuals who more strongly identify with their group are more likely to commit themselves to achieving positive benefits for the group, minimizing harms, and respond more negatively to perceived group threats (e.g., Garcia et al., 2010; Lowery et al., 2006; Turner & Tajfel, 1986; Wellman et al., 2019; Wilkins et al., 2017). Research on White Americans reveals that recognition of systemic racism (or racism more generally) threatens their racial identity by identifying and questioning unearned racial privilege and dominance (Crocker et al., 1999; O'Brien et al., 2009; Operario & Fiske, 2001).

Recognizing racism calls into question Whites' unearned privilege, and thus, threatens their self-worth, particularly when racial inequality is described as systemic (e.g., Lowery et al., 2007; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Furthermore, considering their own racial bias raises concerns about morality (e.g., Bergsieker et al., 2010). This response observed among White Americans can be attributed to the social conditions that perpetuate racial inequality. Specifically, among historically advantaged groups, psychological patterns emerge that influence how they

understand and maintain their advantaged identity (Knowles et al., 2014; Shuman et al., 2024). Lowery et al. (2007) demonstrated that when inequity was framed as an unearned White privilege, it threatened participants' sense of self, as they had to come to terms with an unequal system that exclusively benefitted their group. However, when inequality was framed as anti-Black discrimination, justifying ideologies were used to explain away inequities and portray any advantages as deserved by an individual's hard work. This reframing was found to help keep a positive sense of self, as acknowledging privilege would delegitimize their status and harm their self-concept and their self-esteem.

Political orientation

Another factor that we expect strongly influences people's attitudes toward CRT is political orientation. In America, the battle over CRT has become a polarizing issue, reflecting the increasing partisan divide between conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats (AllSides, 2022; Brown & Enos, 2021; Politico, 2022). CRT calls into question American institutions for their role in oppression; this idea may feel more threatening to those whose party affiliation emphasizes maintaining traditional values and norms. As such, most of the outcry against CRT has been championed by conservative politicians (Sprunt, 2021).

In a two-party system, political parties are set up to emphasize their distinctions and contrasts with each other; this culture of opposition in the U.S. is evident in positions on racial issues. For example, White Republicans believe that White Americans experience more oppression than Black Americans (Peacock & Biernat, 2023). On the other hand, White Democrats are more likely to acknowledge systemic as well as isolated forms of racial prejudice compared to White Republicans as a result of Democrats' more accurate knowledge of critical racial history (Zell & Lesick, 2022). The pattern of political polarization of the discourse around CRT reflects converging interests (which is itself a tenet of CRT). In other words, both parties are taking these stances to respond to the interests of their voting blocs: in the case of the Democrats, a multiracial liberal coalition, and in the case of Republicans, a largely White conservative population. Although we grant that there are many individual-level factors that may mitigate the essentialist determinism of this claim, it is evident that political partisanship plays a major role in shaping people's attitudes. Therefore, we include political orientation as a factor in this research and test its role as a moderator as well as a covariate in the analyses below.

Current research

There is a dearth of empirical evidence on the causes of opposition to CRT, as well as potential ways to reduce misconceptions about CRT. While there is extant research on opposition to other race-related policies, such as affirmative action (e.g., Lowery et al., 2006; O'Brien et al., 2010), CRT is unique in terms of how recently it has emerged into public consciousness and the amount of misinformation that has accompanied its increased salience. We, therefore, propose to fill this gap through three studies. The first two involve both qualitative and quantitative analysis of reasons associated with opposition to CRT; these findings lay the groundwork for our final study, an experiment that introduces an educational intervention to correct misperceptions about CRT. Our primary hypothesis was that the strongest opponents of CRT will actually have the *least* accurate understanding of the CRT (tested in Studies 1 and 2). We predicted that opposition to CRT would be linked to less accurate knowledge of critical Black racial history (Study 2). Furthermore, we

hypothesized that these patterns would be shaped by a number of ideologically based motivations: (a) colorblindness as a racial ideology, such that White people motivated by colorblindness would be more opposed to CRT; (b) racial bias, such that more negative attitudes toward Black people would predict less support for CRT; (c) racial identification, such that those who were highly identified as White would be particularly opposed to CRT; and (d) political orientation, such that White conservatives would express less support for CRT and less understanding of what CRT is relative to White liberals. In Study 3, we tested whether a meta-cognitive intervention that provided corrective information about CRT would reduce opposition to it, and whether this, in turn, might affect attitudes towards Black and White Americans, recognition of systemic and interpersonal racism, even when controlling for political orientation. All data, measures, and syntax across studies can be found at https://osf.io/dk9qz/.

STUDY 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to use qualitative as well as quantitative methods to examine White Americans' beliefs and understanding of CRT. Participants quantified their opposition to CRT, then responded to open-ended prompts that invited them to define CRT and express why they supported or opposed it. These qualitative responses were then coded for accuracy. We expected that participants who generated less accurate definitions of CRT would also express more opposition to the theory. Qualitative data were also explored to identify common themes within participants' logic for supporting or opposing CRT. Additionally, we gathered information on political orientation and attitudes towards White and Black Americans; we predicted that greater political conservatism and more negative feelings toward Black Americans would both correlate with greater opposition to CRT.

Method

Participants

Participants were 199 American adults (103 female) recruited online through Prolific Academic (www.prolific.com). Prolific Academic is a participant recruitment platform where researchers can post studies online and obtain samples in exchange for payment (Stanton et al., 2022). Participants were paid the standard set by the platform for their participation. No participants were excluded. The sample had ages ranging from 18 to 76 ($M = 39.57$, $SD = 13.57$) who all self-identified as White Americans. Political orientation was measured on a scale from 1 (*very liberal*) to 7 (*very conservative)*, and suggested a slightly liberal-leaning sample, $M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.80$. Most respondents indicated National Public Radio (NPR) as their primary source of news (17.1%), followed by the New York Times (NYT; 14.1%), Cable News Network (CNN; 9%), and Fox News (9%).

Measures and procedure

Following the consent process, participants first reported their attitudes toward CRT on a scale from 0 (*strongly oppose*) to 50 (*neutral)* to 100 (*strongly support*), which was reversed to create an opposition to CRT item. Participants next provided a definition of CRT in their own words and rated their confidence in their definition on a 1 (*not at all confident*) to 7 (*very confident*) scale. They were also asked an open-ended question about their reasoning for support or opposition,

TABLE 1 Study 1: Correlations and means for variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	Mean (SD)
1. CRT Opposition	–				45.23
Range: 0–100					(34.69)
2. CRT Definition Accuracy	**−.45**	–			4.92
Range: 1–7					(1.76)
3. Feelings Black/African Americans	**−.33**	**.21**	–		72.42
Range: 1–100					(21.63)
4. Feelings White Americans	**.28**	−.11	**.35**	–	64.94
Range: 0–100					(23.46)
5. Political Orientation	**.71**	**−.46**	**−.27**	**.34**	3.05
Range: 1–7					(1.80)

Note: Bold indicated $p < .05$.

"Describe why you support or oppose the use of Critical Race Theory in school education." Participants then completed feeling thermometers towards Black Americans and White Americans with scale anchors at 0 (*cold*), 50 (*neutral*), and 100 (*warm*). Finally, participants completed demographic measures such as age, race, gender, and political orientation, reviewed a debriefing paragraph, and were thanked and paid through the online platform. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables are in Table 1.

Data coding

Definition of CRT

The open-ended responses to the definition measure were rated on a scale of 1 (*inaccurate*) to 7 (*accurate*) by two independent coders who had familiarized themselves with seminal work that describes the core concepts of CRT (Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; $r = .95$, $p < .001$). The coders rated participants' responses based on their own subjective understanding of the definitions presented in this scholarly work. These ratings were averaged across coders to form a quantitative measure of CRT definition accuracy. An example of an inaccurate definition (score of 1) is, "It has always appeared to me as a biased form of history education that seeks to highlight racial and social injustices caused by white people, in an effort to brainwash children and adolescents into early racism and prejudice against whites." An example of an accurate definition (score of 7) is, "Critical Race Theory is the theory that racism is often integrated into social, economic, and political systems, so that people of color are still discriminated against, even if no individual in the system is directly being explicitly discriminatory. While they may not being [sic] explicitly racist, they're still maintaining a racist system. This is an advanced topic however, and I only have superficial knowledge of the subject."

Reasons for support and opposition of CRT

We used thematic analysis to capture common conceptualizations about CRT. We began by developing a coding scheme: two of the authors (CLW and NRT) read through the responses and separately identified themes related to epistemological considerations. These were combined into one coding scheme through discussion between all four authors. Authors BSR and JDW then carried out coding independently, coding all participant responses for the presence of each theme (kappas ranged from .91 to 1 for each category). Disagreements were resolved through discussion,

and data analyses used resolved coding. To highlight patterns, we divided participants into three categories based on their self-reported opposition to CRT. This was based on the 0–100 response scale that was used for the support/opposition measure completed at the beginning of the study. The responses were categorized into the following: (1) those who opposed CRT (above the midpoint on opposition; >50), (2) those who were neutral (at the midpoint; = 50), and (3) those who supported CRT (below the midpoint on opposition; <50). Of the 199 participants, 97 were categorized as supporters, while 66 were categorized as those opposed, with the remaining 36 being neutral. All responses and coding are provided on OSF.

Results and discussion

Correlates of opposition to CRT

Based on the correlational data, participants who expressed more opposition to CRT also tended to provide less accurate definitions of CRT, supplying evidence for our primary hypothesis (see Table 1). Greater opposition to CRT was also associated with more negative feelings toward Black/African Americans and more positive feelings toward White Americans. As predicted, political orientation (greater conservatism) was also strongly associated with greater opposition to CRT.

Given the strong association between political conservatism and CRT opposition, we ran partial correlations between our variables, controlling for political orientation. Opposition to CRT and the accuracy of participants' definitions remained significantly negatively associated ($r_{partial}$ = −.20, p = .005). Feelings towards Black/African Americans also remained negatively associated with opposition to CRT ($r_{partial}$ = −.21, p = .003) when controlling for political orientation. In other words, inaccurate definitions of CRT and negative attitudes toward Black/African Americans predicted opposition to CRT beyond the influence of political conservatism.

Patterns in reasons for support or opposition to CRT

We utilized the coding scheme developed to analyze participants' open-ended comments justifying their support or opposition for CRT. The final set of themes included truth claims (e.g., "[CRT] is not factual"), claims about the utility of teaching about racism and CRT (e.g., "There is no point focusing on the past, we should just focus on the future"), and claims about the consequences of teaching CRT on race relations (e.g., "Critical Race Theory just begets more racial division").

Amongst supporters of CRT, most responses suggested that CRT conveyed that racism is real and must be acknowledged. Other themes we identified amongst supporters suggested that learning about CRT provides an understanding of racial history that is needed for future change and that CRT is needed to understand present racial inequality.

Amongst those who reported neutral or undecided attitudes towards CRT, the most common theme was lack of knowledge, and that CRT was too complex to be taught in school. Some also mentioned its potential misuse but others suggested it was a noble truth, displaying some of the same themes we saw amongst those who support and oppose CRT.

Among those who opposed CRT, some of the most common themes across responses were that CRT is divisive, judgmental, contributes to further racial tension, is inaccurate, and that racism is not a problem. Participants also expressed opposition to CRT because it had been altered or perverted from its original intent and misused as a weapon. Another major theme that emerged

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TABLE 2 Study 1: Themes emerging from participant responses explaining support/opposition.

Coding variable	Example item(s)	Oppose (N = 66)	Neutral (N = 36)	Support (N = 97)
ACCURACY, VERACITY, TRUTH CLAIMS				
Inaccurate or Untrue: False or wrong	"[CRT] is not factual" and "my belief that CRT is ahistorical and wrong…"	13 (19.7%)	–	–
Denial of Racism: Racism does not exist	"America isn't a racist country" and "Things have improved. Slavery was abolished and equal rights laws passed – the system is not racist."	10 (15.2%)	–	–
Propaganda: Based on propaganda, pushing an agenda	"[CRT] is nothing but propaganda and indoctrination. It has nothing to do with intersectional studies and everything to do with pushing an agenda."	5 (7.6%)	–	–
Misuse: Meaning has changed too much; intended use is no longer the focus	"I oppose CRT because like all social issues it has become perverted from its original goal" and "Its used more like a weapon these days."	10 (15.2%)	5 (13.9%)	1 (1%)
Lack Knowledge: Acknowledges lack of expertise or authority in subject matter	"I cannot either support or oppose this theory as I know nothing about it" and "I don't know enough to not like something."	4 (6.1%)	13 (36.1%)	3 (3.1%)
Too Complex: Topic is Inappropriate or complicated	"[CRT is] too complex for children to understand" and "there is no need to put such ideas in kids heads."	4 (6.1%)	10 (27.8%)	10 (10.3%)
Noble Truth: Race/racism is real; CRT promotes truth and honesty; acknowledgment of systemic racism and White privilege	"I support teaching [CRT] because I believe that it is fair and right to teach things the way they are" and "Everyone should know about race issues."	3	8	63

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Coding variable	Example item(s)	Oppose (N = 66)	Neutral (N = 36)	Support (N = 97)
CONSEQUENCES, RELEVANCE, PURPOSE		(4.5%)	(22.2%)	(64.9%)
Harms Whites: Knowledge causes harm to, racism, or bias against White people	"[CRT] is biased towards Caucasians" and "It is racist against Whites."	9 (13.6%)	–	1 (1%)
Harms Blacks: Knowledge causes harm to, victimizes, and infantilize Black people	"I oppose [CRT] because it gives minorities the mindset that everyone else is to blame for any downfalls they encounter in life and it reduces all self-responsibility."	4 (6.1%)	–	–
Aggravates Divide: The message divides us, makes racism worse	"Critical Race Theory just begets more racial division" and "…judging people based on skin color"	15 (22.7%)	1 (2.8%)	2 (2.1%)
Look Forward: Not worth focusing on past	"There is no point focusing on the past, we should just focus on the future" and "We must be inclusive in all teachings, be forward looking and not looking in the past on this subject."	9 (13.6%)	–	–
Understand Present Inequality: Knowledge is necessary for justice, reveals unfairness, explains inequality	"[CRT] teaches why these minorities have struggled for so long" and "it is important to understand […] knowing is half the battle."	1 (1.5%)	4 (11.1%)	19 (19.6%)
Fuels Future Action: Understanding racial history is necessary for change or fairness	"I would want kids to learn about it young so they can try to address racial inequity" and "if we understand what we did in the past, we can learn to not make those mistakes again."	–	1 (2.8%)	26 (26.8%)

was concern that CRT was racist or biased against White people. Opponents of CRT also suggested that CRT's focus on the past was harmful and it would be preferable to just focus on a better future. These concerns evoke some misunderstandings of CRT and racial history, while suggesting ideological underpinnings of colorblindness, racism, and racial identification.

The themes identified in this investigation provide insights into the general understanding of CRT among Americans. Though responses referred to about a dozen unique reasons to support or oppose CRT, some broader themes are evident. Among those who oppose the theory, the denial of racism as an ongoing problem illustrates the effects of racial ignorance (Bonam et al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2013), while a focus on anticipated harm to White people echoes previous research on White racial identity threat curtailing efforts for equality (Chow et al., 2013; Knowles et al., 2014; Lowery et al., 2006). In contrast, many of those who supported CRT echoed ideas of multiculturalism, an ideology which considers the unique histories and experiences of diverse groups and poses an alternative to a colorblind racial ideology (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010).

Overall, this first study offers an assessment of individuals' support for and knowledge of CRT. Our primary hypothesis was supported: inaccurate definitions of CRT predicted opposition to CRT. However, it is worth noting that our measure of CRT accuracy was based on coders' ratings of participants' self-generated definitions of CRT. While this is useful, there is the possibility that individuals are not providing or accurately presenting all the information they know about CRT in these definitions. Additionally, the nature of our coding process was largely based on coders' judgment. Therefore, a test of participants' knowledge about CRT as measured through true/false questions might provide a less subjective measure of the association between CRT knowledge and opposition to CRT. In this study, we also found that commonly listed reasons for opposition to CRT highlighted common misunderstandings of the theory, and that opposition was associated with negative attitudes towards Black Americans and political conservatism. In Study 2, we took a more quantitative approach to exploring these and related measures, to understand predictors of opposition to CRT.

STUDY 2

To further assess the relationship between knowledge about CRT and opposition to CRT, we designed a series of questions to assess participants' understanding of CRT. This provided a more standardized assessment of participants' knowledge. We again hypothesized that greater knowledge (more correct answers) would be related to lower opposition to CRT. To ensure that understanding about CRT is not simply a proxy for knowledge of critical facts from Black American history, participants also completed a measure of knowledge of critical Black history (Nelson et al., 2013). We hypothesized that greater critical Black history knowledge would predict less opposition to CRT and would be positively associated with, yet distinct from, CRT knowledge scores. We also expected that political conservatism would predict opposition to CRT, and that political orientation and CRT knowledge would interact such that more CRT knowledge would predict greater support among liberal participants as compared to conservative participants. Furthermore, given our finding from Study 1 that opposition to CRT is related to Whites' feelings towards Black/African Americans as well as some of the themes that emerged from the content coding, we included several constructs related to attitudes toward Black/African Americans and racial minorities. We hypothesized that endorsement of colorblind ideology, modern racism, and racial group identification would all be positively associated with opposition to CRT.

Method

Participants

We recruited 194 White American (117 female) participants through Prolific Academic. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 91 ($M = 36.78$, $SD = 13.17$), and averaged ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.78$) for political orientation on a 1 (*very liberal*) to 7 (*very conservative*) scale. Again, we asked participants to indicate their preferred news source. NPR was the most popular source (18%), followed by the NYT (16%), and CNN (12.4%).

Measures and procedure

Upon completing the consent form, participants were asked about their support for CRT on a 100-point scale, which was reverse-scored to measure opposition to CRT, as in Study 1. Participants completed a 15-item true/false quiz measuring knowledge of CRT with six true statements (e.g., "Critical Race Theory interrogates the relationship between law and racial inequality") and nine false statements (e.g., "Critical Race Theory teaches that White people are born racist."). The CRT quiz was developed for the purpose of this study and included common facts and myths about CRT. A 16-item quiz assessed knowledge of critical Black history (Nelson et al., 2013); both knowledge measures also assessed certainty. The scores for the CRT quiz and the critical Black history quiz were the sum of participants' correct answers. The presentation of the two quizzes was counterbalanced (half received the CRT quiz first and half received the critical Black history quiz first) to ensure that the order of measures did not have undue influence on the results.

Participants then completed the following three measures, indicating their agreement with the provided statements on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). First, Neville and et al. (2000) Colorblindness and Racial Attitudes Scale was used to measure colorblind ideology (CoBRAS; 20 items, e.g., "Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich."), which addresses the extent to which participants believe that racial equality can be achieved by ignoring group distinctions and valuing individualism. Second, the Modern Racism scale (adapted from McConahay, 1986; seven items, e.g., "Black/African Americans are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights") measured modern forms of racism in the U.S. Third, a racial group identification measure (adapted from Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992 and McCoy & Major, 2003; six items, e.g., "My racial group is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am") examined the extent to which one's racial group is important to their sense of self. Participants also completed feeling thermometers assessing their attitudes toward Black and White Americans (0 = *cold*, 50 = *neutral*, 100 = *warm*), and answered demographic questions, including political orientation, as described in the participants' subsection. Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and compensated through the online platform. Means, standard deviations, reliability for multi-item scales, and correlations between measures are provided in Table 3.

Results and discussion

Correlations

Correlations between variables are provided in Table 3. At the zero-order level, opposition to CRT was negatively associated with CRT knowledge, knowledge of critical racial history, and

TABLE 3 Study 2: Correlations and descriptives for variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean (*SD*)	α
1. CRT Opposition	–								44.97 (*34.95*)	–
2. CRT Knowledge Score	**−.77**	–							10.20 (*3.30*)	–
3. Critical Black Knowledge Score	**−.35**	**.49**	–						12.54 (*2.15*)	–
4. Colorblind Ideology	**.77**	**−.73**	**−.45**	–					3.09 (*1.46*)	.98
5. Modern Racism towards Blacks	**.66**	**−.66**	**−.48**	**.87**	–				2.25 (*1.21*)	.92
6. Feelings Thermometer Black/African American	**−.23**	**.22**	**−.21**	**−.29**	**−.41**	–			71.57 (*24.07*)	–
7. Feelings Thermometer White Americans	**−.17**	−.12	−.05	**−.25**	.09	**.56**	–		67.17 (*21.71*)	–
8. Racial Group Identification	.06	−.10	**−.15**	**.17**	**.25**	−.07	**.15**	–	2.92 (1.14)	.82
9. Political Orientation	**.76**	**−.63**	**−.30**	**.75**	**.63**	−.11	**.25**	.09	3.09 (1.78)	–

Note: Bold indicated *p* < .05. colorblind ideology and Modern Racism and Racial Group identification Scale were asked on a Likert scale from 1––strongly disagree to 7––strongly agree.

warmth toward Black Americans, as predicted. Opposition to CRT was also positively associated with colorblind ideology, conservative political orientation, and modern racism, but contrary to expectations, was unrelated to racial group identification.

Predictors of opposition to CRT

To test our hypothesis that lesser knowledge about CRT would be linked to greater opposition to it, we conducted a linear regression with CRT knowledge, political orientation, and the interaction between knowledge of CRT and political orientation as predictors of opposition to CRT. Consistent with predictions, there was a significant main effect of CRT knowledge ($b = -6.25$, $SE = .59$, CI: -7.40 to -5.10, $p < .001$) as well as a significant effect of political orientation ($b = 8.83$, $SE = .94$, CI: 6.98–10.68, $p < .001$) in predicting opposition to CRT. As predicted, there was also a significant interaction between political orientation and CRT knowledge on opposition to CRT, Step 2: $\Delta F(1, 190) = 14.70$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .2$, Model: $F(3, 190) = 179.68$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .74$. Among more liberal participants (-1 SD), greater CRT knowledge was associated with less opposition to CRT, $b = -7.91$, $SE = .89$, CI: -9.66 to -6.17, $p < .001$. CRT knowledge was also related to less opposition to CRT among conservatives ($+1$ SD) $b = -4.59$, $SE = .52$, CI: -5.62 to -3.56, $p < .001$, though to a lesser extent than it was for liberals (See Figure 1).

We also ran a regression with all factors, covarying for political orientation, and found that less knowledge about CRT ($b = -4.35$, $SE = .59$, CI: -5.51 to -3.19, $p < .001$) and higher CoBRAS scores ($b = 7.19$, $SE = 2.35$, CI: 2.56–11.82, $p < .001$) were associated with more opposition to CRT (see Table 4). This was consistent with Study 1 and with our hypothesis.

That colorblind ideology emerged as a significant predictor of CRT endorsement suggests that a desire to avoid, or see race/racism as something of the past is associated with opposition to CRT.
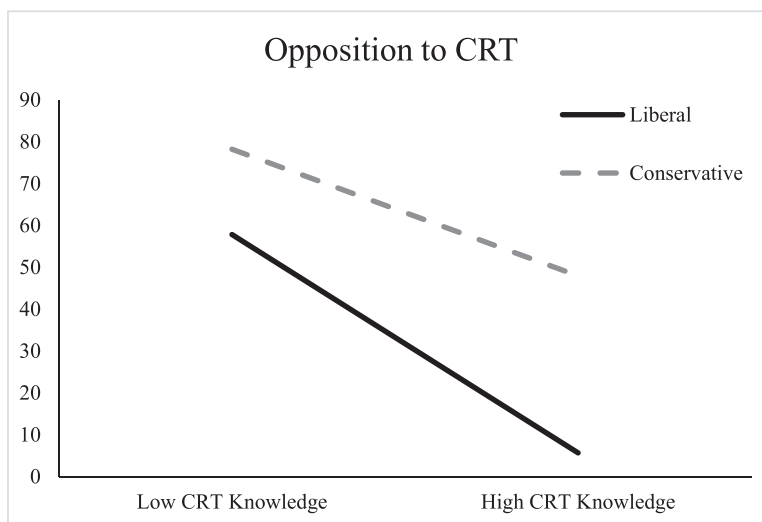
FIGURE 1 Study 2: Opposition to CRT by Political Orientation and CRT Knowledge Score. Low is −1 SD and high is +1 SD in CRT Knowledge.

TABLE 4 Study 2: Regression model of opposition to CRT controlling for political orientation.

| | **Opposition to CRT** | | | |
	b	**SE**	**ΔR^2**	**CI**
Step 1:			.57	
Political orientation	**14.81**	**.91**		[13.02, 16.60]
Step 2:			.17	
CRT knowledge	**−4.35**	**.59**		[−5.51, −3.19]
Critical Black history	.73	.69		[−.63, 2.10]
Racial identification	−1.63	1.16		[−3.91, .65]
Colorblind ideology	**7.19**	**2.35**		[2.56, 11.82]
Modern racism	−2.50	2.41		[−7.25, 2.24]
Feelings Black/African Americans	−.10	.08		[−.25, .06]
Feelings White Americans	.04	.08		[−.12, .20]

Note: Bold indicated *p* < .05. Variance inflation factor (VIF) was below 10 indicating that multicollinearity is not an issue.

The findings regarding colorblind ideology are consistent with the thematic analysis of participants who are opposed to CRT in Study 1. Interestingly, while feelings towards Black/African Americans predicted CRT opposition when controlling for political orientation in Study 1, these findings were not replicated in the regression with all factors included. Modern racism, feelings towards White Americans, and knowledge of critical racial history, although correlated at the zero-order level, similarly, did not emerge as significant predictors within the regression. Racial identification was not predictive at the zero-order correlation level or in the overall regression.

In both Studies 1 and 2, political orientation was a significant predictor of opposition to CRT. However, CRT knowledge was a significant predictor of opposition to CRT above and beyond political orientation. Both qualitative and quantitative data across two studies indicate that more

knowledge of CRT is related to less opposition to CRT. This suggests the possibility that correcting inaccurate knowledge about the meaning and purpose of CRT may be an important point for intervention in changing opposition to CRT. To test this assumption, we designed an intervention to increase accuracy of CRT knowledge to see if it would decrease opposition to CRT.

STUDY 3

To the extent that a person's opposition to CRT is based on a lack of knowledge or disinformation, an educational intervention may reduce that opposition. In Study 3, we developed a meta-cognitive corrective training to test this theory. Meta-cognitive training provides factual evidence that contradicts an individual's false beliefs, prompting them to question their assumptions and to re-evaluate their presumptions. This type of intervention was first developed for clinical work to help psychosis patients by reducing their overconfidence in the veracity of their delusions (Eichner & Berna, 2016; Köther et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2018). It has more recently been applied by researchers studying bias in intergroup contexts. For example, Moritz et al. (2021) used a meta-cognitive corrective intervention to address Islamophobia. They developed a set of multiple-choice questions about Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, which included correct answers as well as answer choices that reflected common biases (i.e., lures). In addition to answering each question, participants shared how confident they were in the accuracy of their answer. After the test, participants were given the correct answers and a short paragraph of information that corrected their misperceptions and provided evidence for the correct answer. This approach reduced Islamophobia as well as anti-Semitism in their sample of European participants (Moritz et al., 2021). Reininger et al. (2020) used the same technique in an American sample to address political divisiveness. They developed questions, which addressed and corrected common political stereotypes, and demonstrated that meta-cognitive correction also works to reduce intergroup bias in the political domain. By having participants confront, the limits of their knowledge in domains where false information abounds, a meta-cognitive corrective intervention reduces the tendency to rely on that false information when making subsequent judgments. Furthermore, by presenting this as an assessment of accuracy rather than as a persuasive appeal from a partisan source, we sought to avoid any reactive devaluation (Hornsey & Esposo, 2009; Stryker et al., 2023).

We developed a similar 10-item test examining knowledge of CRT. In developing these questions, we utilized the themes that were identified during Study 1 in participants' open-ended responses explaining their attitudes toward CRT (see again, Table 2). For our meta-cognitive corrective intervention on CRT, participants were asked to respond to factual questions reflecting common misconceptions about CRT (e.g., that learning about racism is damaging to White children). Each question included a correct answer and a "lure" reflecting a common misunderstanding or bias regarding CRT. Participants rated their confidence in their answer immediately after providing it. After completing all the questions, participants were shown corrective feedback with evidence and citations. Participants also completed demographic information.

We hypothesized that participants who received the full educational intervention immediately prior to completing dependent measures would show a larger decrease in their opposition to CRT compared to those in our control condition who received corrective information after completing the dependent measures. We also tested the intervention's impact on recognition of systemic versus isolated racism and feelings towards Black Americans and White Americans as possible outcomes. We examined whether political orientation might interact with the intervention condition, such that it might have a stronger effect on liberals than on conservatives. This study was preregistered at https://osf.io/3b582/.

Method

Participants

Participants were 302 White American adults recruited online through Prolific Academic. Nine participants were removed for missing attention checks, three were removed for being non-White, and one was removed for being an extreme outlier on our primary measure of interest resulting in a final sample of 289 (50.5% women, 48.8% men, 0.7% nonbinary). The sample had ages ranging from 18 to 77 ($M = 41.51$, $SD = 13.91$). When asked to rate their political orientation on a 1 (*very liberal*) to 7 (*very conservative*) scale, the sample averaged at a 3.11 ($SD = 1.86$) indicating a liberal leaning sample.

Measures

Correlations, means, condition mean differences, and reliability (for composite measures) can be found in Table 5. Opposition to CRT was measured using the same item from our previous studies and was assessed at two time-points to measure within-person change and between condition differences in response to our manipulation. The meta-cognitive corrective intervention included a 10-item quiz and corrective feedback, the full text of which is available in the appendix. CRT knowledge was assessed by summing the number of correct responses to the 10-item quiz. For each item of the CRT knowledge quiz participants indicated their level of certainty that their answer was correct, and these were averaged across the questions to form a measure of certainty in CRT knowledge. Feeling thermometers were used to assess attitudes towards Black and White Americans. To measure perceptions of racism, participants evaluated a variety of situations as to the degree to which they attribute the situation as being due to racism, adapted from Nelson et al. (2013); five items measured recognition of isolated forms of racism (e.g., "Several people walk into a restaurant at the same time. The server attends to all the White customers first. The last customer served happens to be the only person of color"), and five items measured recognition of systemic forms of racism (e.g., "High rates of poverty among Black Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans"). Political orientation was assessed using the same measure used in Studies 1 and 2.

Procedure

Participants were recruited to a study to assess current knowledge and attitudes about a widely debated topic. After completing the consent form, participants first reported their opposition toward CRT (i.e., Time 1 opposition to CRT). Then, participants were instructed that the next part of the experiment was to assess their current knowledge on CRT, and went through the 10-item CRT multiple-choice knowledge quiz, indicating their answers and their confidence in their answers. Participants were randomly assigned to the feedback condition or the control condition (see Figure 2). In the *feedback condition*, participants received feedback immediately after completing the quiz. This meant that for each of the 10 questions, they were told if they got it right or wrong, given the correct answer, and provided with a short informational paragraph that justified the correct answer. Participants then went on to complete the outcome measures, including Time 2 opposition to CRT, acknowledgment of isolated and systemic forms of racism, and feeling thermometers. In the *control condition*, after participants took the quiz, but before receiving

TABLE 5 Study 3: Correlations and descriptives for variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	α
1. CRT Opposition Time 1 (0—support, 50—neutral, 100—oppose)	–									–
2. CRT Opposition Time 2 (0—support, 50—neutral, 100—oppose)	**.92**	–								–
3. CRT Knowledge	**−.47**	**−.48**	–							–
4. Certainty of CRT Knowledge (1—Guessing, 4—Definitely certain)	**−.24**	**−.17**	**.31**	–						.90
5. Feelings Thermometer Black Americans (0—Cold, 100—Warm)	**−.22**	**−.22**	.07	−.02	–					–
6. Feelings Thermometer White Americans (0—Cold, 100—Warm)	**.13**	.10	**−.21**	−.10	**.55**	–				–
7. Systemic Racism (1—strongly disagree, 7—strongly agree)	**−.62**	**−.62**	**.35**	**.22**	**.22**	−.14	–			.86
8. Individual Racism (1—strongly disagree, 7—strongly agree)	**−.48**	**−.47**	**.38**	**.18**	**.25**	−.08	**.74**	–		.83
9. Political orientation (1—very liberal, 7—very conservative)	**.66**	**.63**	**−.37**	**−.19**	−.09	**.26**	**−.54**	**−.40**	–	–
Control Mean (SD)	45.37[a] (36.79)	42.63[a] (36.75)	6.87[a] (2.05)	2.56[a] (.69)	75.67[a] (19.87)	71.68[a] (21.92)	4.71[a] (1.31)	5.13[a] (1.19)	3.25[a] (1.89)	
Feedback Mean (SD)	41.32[a] (32.87)	32.08[b] (34.46)	6.76[a] (2.33)	2.47[a] (.72)	72.44[a] (20.07)	72.14[a] (19.23)	4.61[a] (1.39)	5.16[a] (1.21)	2.97[a] (1.83)	

Note: Bold indicated $p < .05$. Different superscript in column indicates significant mean difference.

the correct answers, they completed the outcome measures, including Time 2 opposition to CRT. After completing all measures of interest, control participants viewed the correct responses to the CRT knowledge quiz. Finally, all participants responded to demographic questions including age, gender, race, and political orientation, and were debriefed and thanked.

Control Condition:
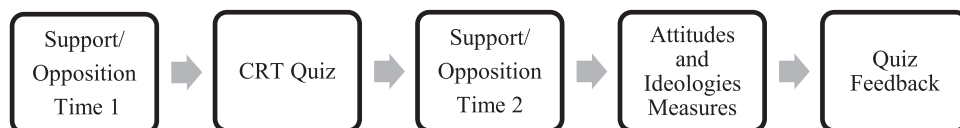
Feedback Condition:

FIGURE 2   Study 3: Survey flow.

Results and discussion

Confirming random assignment

There were no significant differences across conditions in Time 1 opposition to CRT, $t(287) = .99$, $p = .32$, CI: -4.02 to 12.14, Cohen's $d = .12$. There were no significant differences between conditions in the number of correct answers on the 10 questions about CRT knowledge, $t(287) = .45$, $p = .65$, CI: $-.39$ to $.62$, Cohen's $d = .05$. In addition, there were no differences by condition in the certainty of their CRT knowledge, $t(287) = 1.15$, $p = .25$, CI: $-.07$ to $.26$, Cohen's $d = .14$. These results indicate that random assignment was successful and that post-feedback condition differences can be attributed to the manipulation.

Effects of intervention on opposition to CRT

To examine our primary hypothesis that receiving corrective feedback would increase support for CRT, we conducted a 2 between-participant (Condition: Control vs. Feedback) × 2 within-participant (Time 1 vs. Time 2) mixed model ANOVA. There was no between-subject main effect of condition, $F(1, 287) = 3.23$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, but there was a significant within-subject main effect, $F(1, 287) = 53.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$, which was qualified by a significant interaction between condition and time, $F(1, 287) = 15.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$ (see Figure 3). This indicates that participants' change in opposition to CRT from the first time-point to the second differed based on the condition to which they were assigned. Simple pairwise comparisons of time were examined within condition to probe the interaction. This analysis revealed a significant decrease in opposition to CRT between Time 1 and Time 2 in the feedback condition, $F(1, 287) = 63.41$, $p < .001$, CI: -11.52 to -6.95, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. There was also a significant difference in opposition to CRT between Time 1 and Time 2 in the control condition, however, to a lesser extent, $F(1, 287) = 5.56$, $p = .02$; CI: -5.03 to $-.45$; $\eta_p^2 = .02$. This suggests that receiving corrective feedback decreased opposition to CRT. It also suggests that simply answering direct questions about CRT may reduce opposition, as we saw a small but significant decrease among participants in the control condition. Importantly, participants who received corrective feedback reported significantly less opposition to CRT than did the control participants at Time 2, $F(1,287) = 6.34$, $p = .012$, CI: -18.80 to -2.30, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.
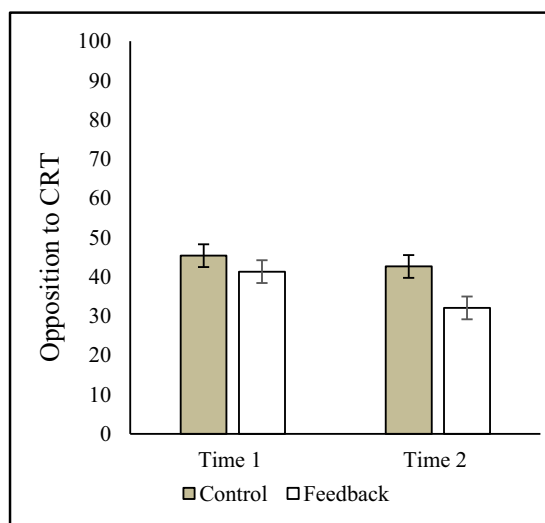
FIGURE 3 Study 3: Opposition to CRT by time and condition. Error bars represent $+/- 1$ SE. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Both participants who only answered the questions and participants who answered the questions and received corrective feedback showed a decrease in opposition to CRT, but those who also received corrective feedback showed a larger decline in opposition to CRT. As both conditions involved being tested on CRT knowledge at the outset and to some extent having to acknowledge the limits of one's understanding, it is somewhat unsurprising that both conditions showed some movement. Our analysis was a fairly conservative test of the treatment's efficacy, as previous meta-cognitive intervention studies have primarily compared treatment with no information, a fact-sheet, or different variations on the timing and specificity of feedback (Moritz et al., 2021; Reininger et al., 2020).

Additional analyses

We examined the possibility that political orientation might moderate the effectiveness of our meta-cognitive intervention. To examine this prospect, we calculated a difference score by subtracting CRT opposition at Time 1 from CRT opposition at Time 2 to create a change score (negative numbers indicate a reduction in CRT opposition). We conducted a linear regression with condition (0 = Control, 1 = Feedback) × Political Orientation (continuous), predicting change in CRT opposition. There was no main effect of political orientation ($b = -.86$, $SE = .62$, CI: -2.09 to .67, $p = .16$) and no interaction between condition and political orientation ($b = .75$, $SE = .89$, CI: -1.01 to 2.50, $p = .40$) on change in CRT opposition. To be consistent with our approach from Studies 1 and 2, we also examined political orientation as a covariate in our primary analysis to demonstrate that our effects were not contingent on the possible influence of political orientation. Political orientation was a significant covariate, $F(1, 284) = 215.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .43$, in predicting opposition to CRT; however, controlling for political orientation did not change our observed within-participant effects.[2]

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[2] Detailed descriptions of these analyses can be found on OSF.

We also tested for conditional effects of the intervention on attitudes towards Black/African Americans and White Americans, and perceptions of isolated and systemic racism. We found no significant mean condition differences in these outcome variables (see Table 5). This indicates that the intervention only seemed to affect attitudes toward CRT and did *not* extend into a broader acknowledgment of systemic racism or an improvement in racial attitudes.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

For more than 40 years, CRT was an esoteric framework used by academic scholars to better understand race and racism in the United States. In the past few years, CRT has become a feature of public debate about how to grapple with our nation's racial history. Amidst the controversy, understanding of CRT has morphed. We suggested that a primary factor of opposition against CRT may lie in the misunderstanding of the theory's principles and implications, potentially fueled by deliberate misinformation campaigns.

Three studies supported our hypothesis that opposition to CRT was fueled by inaccurate understanding of the theory. White American opponents of CRT tended to produce less accurate definitions of the theory in Study 1. In Study 2, less knowledge about CRT was a significant predictor of opposition, as was both colorblind ideology and conservative political orientation. A metacognitive intervention to increase participants' knowledge in Study 3 resulted in greater support for CRT. Although political orientation did predict less accurate knowledge and greater opposition to CRT, the effect of knowledge on support for CRT was independent of political orientation. Taken together, the present work contributes to understanding how ignorance may breed opposition. It also highlights the significance of efforts to restrict the availability of knowledge about American history through anti-CRT legislation.

Our results are consistent with a growing body of research exploring the epistemology of ignorance (Bonam et al, 2019; Nelson et al., 2013; Outlaw, 2007), as those with the least accurate understanding of CRT were most likely to oppose the use of CRT in education. This research also provides another demonstration that educational interventions can be effective in shifting attitudes (e.g., Bonam et al., 2019; Fang & White, 2022). Providing corrective information about CRT only decreased opposition to CRT without simultaneously shifting perceptions of systemic racism, racial attitudes, or perceptions of isolated racism. These results suggest that the corrective intervention focused on CRT may be so specific that people did not grasp the broader implications for systemic racism. It may also reflect the possibility that by changing attitudes toward CRT, participants felt that they did not also need to shift other racial attitudes because of moral credentialing (Monin & Miller, 2001). However, it is also possible that decreased opposition to CRT makes people open to exploring the theory further and that, in the long term, such openness would shape perceptions of systemic racism. Future research can examine whether lower opposition to CRT is also associated with a behavioral interest in learning more about the theory and subsequent implications. Another aspect of our findings that merits further exploration is the role of prior certainty and intellectual humility in determining the effectiveness of an educational treatment.[3] Increasing individuals' receptiveness to corrective information by acknowledging the shortcomings of their own knowledge may allow for educational interventions to be more effective.

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[3] Supplemental analyses of participant certainty as a moderator of the intervention's effect and of exploratory analyses for political orientation are provided here and on OSF.

Although our results provide convergent evidence that ignorance is a key factor for understanding opposition to CRT, it is worth noting that our findings are limited to White Americans. Future research should use a more diverse sample to test whether effects are consistent across racial groups who may vary in CRT support (Safarpour et al., 2021). While we assessed racial group identification, future research could examine American identification as a predictor of support for CRT, as the theory recontextualizes and interrogates American institutions and history (see Jardina, 2019; Theiss-Morse, 2009). Even though we demonstrated that our meta-cognitive intervention was effective in changing individuals' support for CRT, it is unclear how long-lasting these changes may be. Future research should examine the longitudinal impact of this intervention.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

These studies offer a new understanding of factors, which predict opposition to CRT and an intervention used to increase knowledge about and support for CRT. While the focus of this research is individuals' CRT support, it has important implications for education more broadly. For example, it clarifies the extent to which educational efforts are important in shaping attitudes. It also helps contextualize legislative efforts to rid references of race/racism from school curriculums (e.g., Kendi, 2023; Kim, 2023). As such, it may offer a tool for critical consciousness, which may assist people in recognizing how legislation restricting discussion about causes of racial inequality serves to perpetuate racial inequality. Therefore, this work as a whole explores the role of knowledge and motivation in shaping the systems that uphold epistemologies of ignorance.

The success of our educational intervention in increasing support for CRT underscores the importance of knowledge about racism in efforts to reduce racial prejudice and inequality (e.g., López, 2022; Hughes et al., 2007; Iyer et al., 2003). Efforts to ban books and lesson plans that mention race or other marginalized identities are intended to perpetuate ignorance, and preventing people from learning about the sources of inequality will only serve to prolong it. Thus, it is important for policymakers, educators, and citizens to continue to articulate the aspects of our shared history that demonstrate how racial inequality has been perpetuated and consider solutions as to how it can be dismantled in each forum and medium available.

CONCLUSION

Across three studies, we discovered that knowledge of CRT was a vital component for individuals' support for the use of CRT in education. This finding highlights the detrimental effect of banning education about systemic racism and critical historical perspectives. The fundamentally reinforcing nature of ignorance about CRT and structural racism, on the one hand, and opposition to grappling with the legacy of racism, on the other, demonstrates how epistemologies of ignorance operate. This requires a response that focuses on an honest and thorough accounting of who we are, and how we got here, in order to determine where we are headed as a nation.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

Appendix

TEXT OF THE METACOGNITIVE CORRECTIVE INTERVENTION FOR CRT

Words in brackets [i.e., lure and correct] are provided for researchers' information and are not meant to be visible to participants. Each content-based question is followed by the question "How certain are you of your answer?," which participants answer on a 4-point Likert scale (100% sure, rather sure, rather unsure, guessing).

Instructions to participants: The following is a quiz to assess your knowledge of Critical Race Theory. Please read each statement carefully and answer based on what you think is correct. Please do not leave the survey to look up the correct answer; we are interested in your current knowledge.

1. **Which of the following is suggested by Critical Race Theory?**
   a. White Americans are naturally racist [lure]
   b. Racism is an individual problem
   c. People should be judged by their skin color
   d. Certain laws in America have played a role in perpetuating racial inequality [correct]

Corrective info: With a focus on legal institutions and policies, Critical Race Theory does not teach anything about people's inherent character or essential traits. In other words, CRT does not make any claims about White people's levels of prejudice or suggest that skin color should determine how people are judged. It contradicts the idea that racism is purely individually based, instead focusing more on systemic factors that shape people's lives. (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica definition, https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory).

1. **What group is credited with creating Critical Race Theory (CRT)?**
   a. Academic scholars [correct]
   b. Political radicals [lure]
   c. The media (i.e. newspapers)
   d. Elementary school teachers

Corrective info: The framework of Critical Race Theory was officially organized in 1989 at an academic conference, although the roots go back into decades of legal scholarship. Some of the first people associated with Critical Race Theory were law professors associated with a number of different universities including Harvard, Columbia, UCLA, Stanford, Chicago, and University of Wisconsin–Madison. (Source: Ansell, A. (2008). "Critical Race Theory." In Schaefer, Richard T. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society, Volume 1*. SAGE Publications. pp. 344−346).

1. **Where is Critical Race Theory generally implemented?**
   a. Elementary schools [lure]
   b. Law schools [correct]
   c. Congress
   d. West coast schools

Corrective info: Critical Race Theory is a framework of legal scholarship which focuses on legal practices and policies that govern society. Due to the required basis of knowledge of history, government, and legal code that one must have to understand it, Critical Race Theory is primarily presented in law schools across the United States, *not* in elementary schools. However, in political discourse, the term has been generally applied to a range of concepts and curricular approaches that address the topic of race in any form, for all age ranges.

Critical Race Theory is often confused with "Culturally Responsive Teaching" (which shares the same initials), a method for K-12 teachers to consider children's backgrounds, family experiences, cultural values, and everyday challenges to effectively teach students. (Source: Pennsylvania School Board Association, https://www.psba.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CriticalRaceTheory_Information.pdf).

1. **A survey of African American adolescents found that 50% of them reported having experienced what at their school during the last 3 months?**
   a. Receiving a lower grade than deserved
   b. Being wrongly disciplined or given detention by a teacher
   c. Being called racial slurs by other kids at school [correct]
   d. Feeling proud of their racial heritage because of learning CRT [lure]

Corrective info: Half of African American students reported being called a racial slur by other students at their school in the past 3 months, according to research by scholars at the University of North Carolina. Even higher percentages reported being wrongly disciplined (63%) or receiving a lower grade than deserved (66%). CRT is not taught in these schools. The majority of students reported that messages of pride in their background came from their parents, rather than schools. Positive messages from parents protected African American students from the distress caused by the racial harassment they faced at school. (Source: Harris-Britt, A., Valrie, C. R., Kurtz-Costes, B., & Rowley, S. J. (2007). Perceived racial discrimination and self-esteem in African American

youth: Racial socialization as a protective factor. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *17*(4), 669–682. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2917995/).

1. **What implications does Critical Race Theory have for American history?**
   a. CRT rewrites American history to make Whites look bad and to advantage minorities [lure]
   b. CRT explores the lasting effects of slavery/racism in institutions and systems [correct]
   c. CRT teaches that Americans should be ashamed about their history
   d. CRT ignores what makes America exceptional and makes it seem like any other country

Corrective info: The purpose of CRT is to recognize the consequences of history. There have been laws passed in the history of the United States that only provided rights and benefits to some people and withheld them from others based on their race. For example, the right to vote, freedom from slavery, the right to travel freely, access to medical care, minimum wage protections, and federal benefits for veterans have all been restricted to those legally classified as White. The existence of these laws is a historical fact.

Over decades, these laws that disadvantaged Black people and other racial minorities had ill effects on families' economic well-being, their physical health, and their access to education and employment. Many of these laws were later amended, yet their consequences on society as a whole have not been erased. Critical race theory does not revise history, nor does it prescribe an emotional response to learning about it. It does invite people to identify the impact of the past on the present, and perhaps to work for a better future for all members of society. (Reference: Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). Critical race theory—What it is not!. In *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (pp. 32–43). Routledge).

1. **White students in a summer camp who were exposed to history lessons about racism reported**:
   a. Being bored and uninterested
   b. Valuing racial fairness more [correct]
   c. Feeling more negative attitudes toward White people [lure]
   d. Less interest in math and science

Corrective info: In a study comparing White students who received history lessons that included information about racism, or otherwise identical lessons that omitted this information, White students who had learned about racism valued racial fairness more, expressed fewer negative attitudes toward Black people, and expressed no change in their attitudes about White people. (Source: Hughes, J. M., Bigler, R. S., & Levy, S. R. (2007). Consequences of learning about historical racism among European American and African American children. *Child Development, 78*(6), 1689–1705.)

1. **Critical Race Theory was developed in conjunction with**:
   a. Marxism
   b. Black Lives Matter [lure]
   c. The 1619 Project
   d. Intersectionality [correct]

Corrective info: The term Critical Race Theory was coined by legal scholars in the late 1980s to recognize the ways in which race interacts with the legal system. This happened in conjunction

with the development of intersectionality, which highlights the dynamics between people's many social categories (including gender, religion, citizenship, as well as race).

By contrast, Marxism was developed much earlier, in the late 1800s. To some extent, CRT is a reaction *against* Marxism's exclusive focus on class. Critical Race Theory also far precedes the Black Lives Matter movement which started in 2013, and the 1619 Project which was a journalistic effort dating to 2021. (Source: Crenshaw et al. (1995). *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement.* New York: The New Press.)

1. **How does Critical Race Theory interpret the Constitution?**
   a. CRT rejects the Constitution as an invalid document
   b. CRT denounces the Constitution as conservative propaganda [lure]
   c. CRT views the Constitution as sacred, holy, and inviolable
   d. CRT explores how the text of the original Constitution and its amendments affected racial relations in America [correct]

Corrective information: The Constitution was founded on the principle of democracy, where *citizens* have a voice in shaping their government. Critical Race Theory does not reject these ideas; it helps legal scholars to understand the way race is related to law. For example, the original Constitution allowed severe restrictions on who had the right to vote; furthermore, it counted enslaved Black people as only 3/5ths of a person to determine allocation of political power. That was later changed by amendments to the Constitution in the 1800s and 1900s. (Source: https://constitutionus.com).

1. **What does Critical Race Theory say about White people?**
   a. Critical Race Theory teaches White people they should feel guilty and ashamed. [lure]
   b. Critical Race Theory suggests that racism between White and Black people is inevitable.
   c. Critical Race Theory argues that achieving racial justice and equality between racial groups requires discriminating against White people. [lure]
   d. Critical Race Theory indicates that White people have benefited from decades of laws designed to benefit White people but not other groups. [correct]

Corrective info: Critical Race Theory examines the relationship between law and racial inequality, including the lingering consequences of slavery, segregation, and state-sanctioned violence against Black people. Addressing this historical legacy of racial injustice so that all Americans can get the same rights and benefits does not mean that White people are losing any rights or benefits, nor does it require anyone to feel personally guilty. Rather, as all people get the rights to which they are entitled, the society as a whole and all its members benefit substantially. (Source: Ansell, A. (2008). "Critical Race Theory." In Schaefer, Richard T. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society, Volume 1.* SAGE Publications. pp. 344−346).

1. **When racial topics are discussed within a classroom, Black and White students . . .**
   a. start treating each other with distrust and hostility [lure]
   b. become more able to recognize, discuss, and combat racism [correct]
   c. become more racist in their speech and actions
   d. disengage from the conversation

<u>Corrective info:</u> Many people think that avoiding the topic of race and racial labels should be enough to eliminate racism. Unfortunately, not naming race makes it impossible to recognize or directly address inequality that continues to exist in society. Furthermore, studies have shown that people who go out of their way to avoid discussing race are seen as more awkward, insincere, and prejudiced. They are also more likely to display racial bias (on both explicit and implicit measures) than individuals who recognize race. In sum, because racial bias does influence people's opportunities for education, employment, justice, and health care, avoiding race by taking a "colorblind" approach could in fact make racism worse. Source: Apfelbaum, E. P., Norton, M. I., & Sommers, S. R. (2012). Racial color blindness: Emergence, practice, and implications. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 21*(3), 205–209.

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