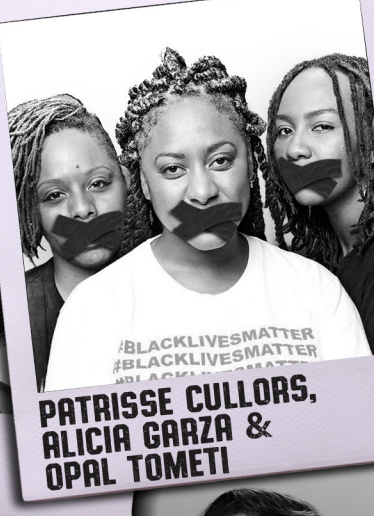
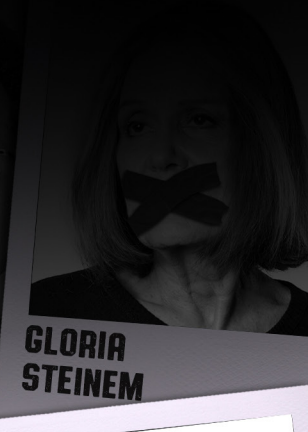
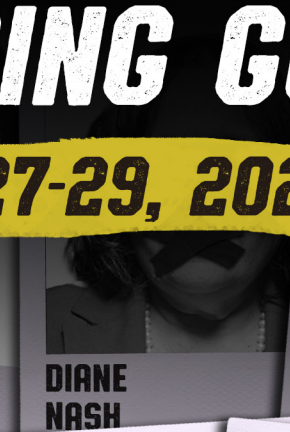


# #TRUTHBETOLD

## MESSAGING GUIDE

**AUGUST 27-29, 2021**

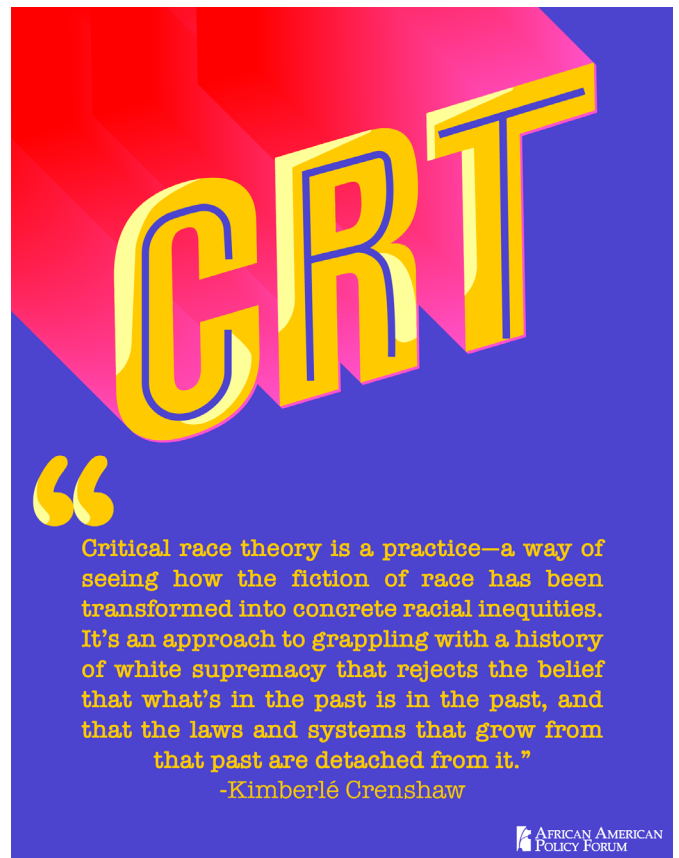


**NATIONAL DAYS OF ACTION**  
**CO-SPONSORED BY**  
**BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL**  
**AND ZINN EDUCATION PROJECT**

# AAPF #TRUTHBETOLD MESSAGING GUIDE

## I. INTRODUCTION TO THE AAPF MESSAGING GUIDE: WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT IT?

- A. **Developed by the legal scholar who originally coined the terms “critical race theory” and “intersectionality”:** This messaging guide is published by the African American Policy Forum, led by Executive Director Kimberlé Crenshaw, Professor at Columbia and UCLA law schools. Professor Crenshaw coined the terms “critical race theory” and “intersectionality” in 1989 and is the most credible and authoritative source on questions about critical race theory. These concepts have traveled worldwide as tools of analysis for racial and social justice.
- B. **Provides a coherent messaging platform for three key stakeholders:** This messaging guide was developed in recognition of three key groups of stakeholders at the heart of this current disinformation campaign. One platform of messages engages public education—especially **K-12 Teachers**. Another platform addresses **Racial Justice Advocates**, while a third considers the conversation from the vantage point of **Voting Rights or Democracy Activists**. Each platform states the shared values, and analysis of the problem and solution from its stakeholder perspective.
- C. **Offers a unifying message to lift up racial justice work across spaces** to Resist Divide-and-Conquer Dynamics (K-12, Higher Ed, DEI, CRT academics)
- D. **Clarifies what CRT is and is not in background section**, while focusing on the real issues in the debate
- E. **Allows users the freedom to select from the best messages** across stakeholder platforms for their specific audiences and purposes.





## II. BACKGROUND ON DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

### A. **General disposition towards the disinformation campaign: Consider the source**

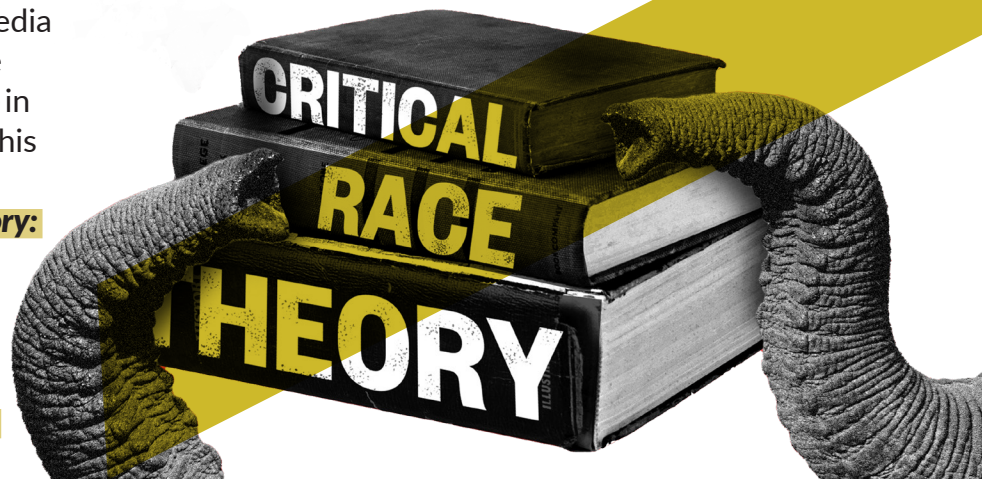
The assault on CRT isn't happening in isolation—and media outlets are prone to treat it as though it is. So make explicit connections. Tell reporters and audiences that if you were appalled by the January 6th Capitol Insurrection; if you were disturbed when a major political party responded to losing an election by changing the rules of the game to disenfranchise minority voters with voter restriction laws, you need to view the CRT moral panic in the same light. In this case, the exact same funding sources and activists on the right are leading a coordinated movement pressuring states to censor talk of racial justice in K-12. And behind the CRT uproar on the right is a decades-long agenda to underfund and undermine public education. With this bigger picture in view, reporters and audiences can clearly grasp that these forces, funded by dark money, are rejoicing in the current smear campaign against critical race theory (“CRT”). In order to help you flesh out these connections, this media guide is designed to a) help you understand the media coverage to date; b) help you respond to media interview requests; and c) provide insights on how best to intervene in the current conversations about this disinformation campaign.

### B. **Background about critical race theory:**

- **Critical race theory is a scholarly legal inquiry that asks how and why gaping racial inequalities remain so durable decades after this country formally repudiated**

**white supremacy in the mid-twentieth century and recommitted our nation to formal equality.** Critical race theory is not remotely what the right wing disinformation campaign says it is.

- **Critical race theory is a way of unearthing the ways our society has structured racial inequality into its everyday institutions, practices and policy priorities.** The “critical race” part of CRT holds that there is no natural explanation for contemporary patterns of racial inequality, and that race is a social construction. The “theory” part of CRT signals that the project looks beyond the important but limited scope of bringing lawsuits. Instead, critical race theorists look at the wider ways that racism works to better understand why seemingly “race-neutral” and “colorblind” rules underwrite systemic inequalities. The term “critical race theory” is not mysterious, sinister, or anti-American. It is easily explainable, descriptively accurate, and fully consistent with the essential democratic aims of fostering racial and social equality.
- **Critical race theory originated in law schools, but over time, professional educators and activists in a host of settings—K-12 teachers,** DEI advocates, racial justice and democracy activists, among others—applied CRT to help recognize and eliminate systemic



racism. This shared objective has gained critical urgency and popular support during the year of “racial reckoning” in the wake of the 2020 killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery.

- **The whole point of critical race theory is to challenge stereotypical and essentialist ascriptions of behavior based on race or skin color—and to repudiate the idea that we can talk about racism only as a moral failing of individuals.** Detractors of critical race theory purposely conflate teaching about systemic racism with assigning individual blame or labeling individuals on the basis of their race. The aim here is to stigmatize CRT as needlessly “divisive” and racially inflammatory—and thereby to continue stoking a moral panic over public education to combat racism, while more broadly shutting down public discussion of systemic racism entirely. This campaign of disinformation and demonization pivots on the notion that CRT advocates are hellbent on their own stigmatizing campaign—to label all white people as “racist” or to provoke personal shame about the

history of white supremacy in this country. Nothing could be further from the truth—the effort to personally deride CRT advocates as “the real racists” in an otherwise colorblind social order is a transparent attempt to reclaim the moral high ground for those who want to shut down honest discussion of racial inequality in this country. And like the other elements of the crackdown on CRT, the explicit goal of this slanderous campaign is to insulate the actual bad actors here from any criticism or public scrutiny: the white nationalist right, which includes both those who oppose our country’s post-George Floyd racial reckoning and the backers of the Capitol insurrection, voter restriction laws, and vaccine disinformation.

- **Critical race theorists understand that we can’t fight for racial justice if we can’t see, speak, and learn about racial injustice.** Colorblindness is an empty ideal that works to ensure confirmation of its own premises: If one is not permitted to see the social consequences of policies in terms of race, then the disparate racial effects of policies simply become invisible.



### III. MESSAGES FOR THREE STAKEHOLDER PLATFORMS: BASIC STRUCTURE TO THE MESSAGING GUIDE:

**Shared values in blue:** Each platform begins with the shared value articulating the positive vision or program likely to resonate with a given stakeholder audience.

**Challenges/threats to shared values in red:** The next section in red raises the threats or challenges to the expressed shared value.

**Call-to-action in green:** The final section of each platform addresses solutions to the problem.

#### A. POSITIVE OR SHARED VALUES

##### 1. PLATFORM FOR EDUCATORS

**Background:** Great teaching involves questioning conventional wisdom, unearthing contradictions and tensions, and engaging in controversial inquiries. When people look honestly at the history of the United States, they are likely to see many contradictions and tensions, including legacies of injustice existing alongside long struggles for justice, and competing ways of interpreting them. Imagine if Germany banned all discussion of “fascism” in its school curriculum for being “divisive,” or if South Africa prohibited any teacher from teaching the concept of “apartheid” for causing “discomfort.” The banning of curricular subjects as somehow harmful to the self-image of the nation is, like book-burning, a hallmark of authoritarian rule. Bans on ideas and concepts as fundamental as “racism” and “sexism” explicitly target the ability of students of color and female/nonbinary students to see themselves in the curriculum and succeed in school and life. A public education that seeks to serve only some of its students is fundamentally undemocratic.

**We should all seek to foster robust classroom conversations and debate about structural inequalities.** State bans on teaching about racial injustice include prohibitions that are overbroad, vague and highly subjective. Such bans seek to impose sanctions and penalties if even one student might feel “discomfort” in a classroom, or might believe that a particular lesson or curricular subject is “divisive.” If you care about education as the cornerstone of democracy, you should care about this attack on public education—and organize to resist it.

**We must support our teachers’ freedom to teach the truth about our accurate history.** Teachers must be allowed to teach the facts to be effective. These laws seek to create a chilling effect on public speech about race. Regardless of which state happens to ratify a ban on CRT, teachers everywhere will be fearful of teaching the truth about systemic racism and sexism.







## 2. PLATFORM FOR RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES

**Background:** Racial justice advocates have created a powerful multiracial movement to challenge the naturalization of anti-Black police violence that allowed the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, among many others. Black Lives Matter has catalyzed an unprecedented worldwide mobilization, inspiring tens of millions of Americans of all races to demand institutional accountability and reform. Using an intersectional lens to organize power, racial justice activists are employing their hard-won political wisdom to demonstrate how structures of inequality link the fates of communities of color, LGBT people, women, immigrants and refugees, disabled people, religious minorities and other marginalized constituencies. The growing empowerment of racial justice advocates and their allies is deeply threatening to the status quo.

**Communities of color have proven that when we come together, we can move the needle.**

Thanks to years of grassroots organizing, multiracial coalitions produced a record Black voter turnout in Georgia to seal a victory over Trump and to send the first-ever Black and Jewish candidates to the U.S. Senate from the state of Georgia. In Arizona, Latinx organizers mounted an unprecedented grassroots mobilization effort – the culmination of years of concerted on-the-ground organizing – to turn Arizona blue.



### 3. PLATFORM FOR DEMOCRACY/VOTING RIGHTS STAKEHOLDERS

**Background:** Last year, large majorities of Americans woke up to the reality of systemic racism in the United States, and dedicated themselves to building an inclusive, anti-racist future. This movement for equality was met with backlash when President Trump signed an executive order in September 2020 targeting anti-racist and anti-sexist education. We saw this backlash continue on January 6th, when a violent mob attempted to carry out a coup to overturn the results of the presidential election. Since then, the right's propaganda and censorship campaign has grown to monumental proportions, undermining the conditions for democratic participation where it is most at risk: in our schools and in the media. It's thus crucial to make the central organizing message here as plain as possible: If you reject the bigotry of the Proud Boys, who refer to Black Lives Matter activists as "degenerate criminal lowlives," and the alt-right strategist and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon, who said being called racist is a "badge of honor;" then you should know that they are rejoicing in the current smear campaign against critical race theory.

**We know that democracy requires freedom of thought, expression and inquiry, and that any society that seeks to censor teachers who are teaching historical facts is headed for disaster.** History tells us that one of the first warning signs of authoritarianism is the crackdown on intellectual freedom. In 1930s Germany, Nazis organized the burnings of books that challenged party doctrine on race, history and social order. In order to confront our nation's most serious problems, we must be able to engage in robust debate over ideas, free of the specter of state-sponsored censorship.

**The current state-by-state strategies to suppress voting rights, protest, and ideas are interconnected, and together they pose an urgent threat to the continued functioning of America's democracy.** The right to vote is the cornerstone of any functioning democracy. Any society that allows the disenfranchisement of minority voters and minority histories and ideas cannot call itself a true democracy.



## B. PROBLEM, CHALLENGE OR THREAT

### 1. PLATFORM FOR EDUCATORS

One of the biggest lies in this coordinated disinformation campaign is that critical race theory is about labeling individual people “racist.” This campaign is coordinated by conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and Manhattan Institute that have for decades sought to undermine and privatize public education. The larger strategy here is to divide and confuse those who supported the post-George Floyd/Breonna Taylor racial reckoning, using CRT as “boogeyman.” Critical Race Theory is not the idea that racism is inherent in any human being. When you hear that teachers are using CRT in K-12 schools to label white children as racist oppressors and children of color as hapless victims, that is not Critical Race Theory. Nothing could be further from the truth.



### 2. PLATFORM FOR RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES

The utter panic manufactured around “critical race theory” seeks to transfer the moral high ground from racial justice movements and other marginalized groups, to the forces determined to defeat such movements.

As images of our 2020 summer of racial reckoning spread across the world, the right has been scrambling to identify a way to snuff out this transformative power. In the CRT scare, the strategists and funders of the militant right think they’ve found it. This repressive censorship campaign seeks to ban the discussion of concepts such as “racism” that they arbitrarily deem “unpatriotic.”

The attempt to ban teachers from discussing concepts such as “racism” in our public schools recalls the fanatical purges of the McCarthy-era. Today we are seeing the revival of a new racialized McCarthyism, which follows the lead of that midcentury moral panic by labeling anti-racist ideas as “divisive” and “un-American.”





### 3. PLATFORM FOR DEMOCRACY/VOTING RIGHTS STAKEHOLDERS

**Once a fringe element outside of mainstream politics, far right extremist strategies now occupy the center of power within the GOP.**

Steve Bannon and his alt-right allies are no doubt thrilled to see suburban moms and others who have lately turned away from Trumpism taking up talking points on CRT. The crusade against CRT has emerged as a wedge issue for the 2022 midterms: a new basis to help secure a deeply undemocratic, white nationalist agenda in the American political mainstream.

**Anti-CRT propaganda represents The Next Big Lie—i.e., a de facto claim that the government should play no role in eliminating systemic racism.** The Big Lie campaign against CRT is a companion strategy to the last Big Lie of the Trumpian right: the fantasy that the 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump. Both lies are tied together by a highly undemocratic vision of America, one that expressly excludes Black people, Jews and other people of color from participating equally in democracy.

## C. CALL TO ACTION AND ASK

### 1. PLATFORM FOR EDUCATORS

**We cannot allow politicians to dumb down public school curricula to satisfy their narrow definition of “patriotic education.”**

The crackdown on CRT seeks to censor and shut down the very conversations on systemic racism and sexism that students are eager to engage in, depriving them of the opportunity to develop analytic tools, and rendering them less prepared for college and career development in the name of “patriotic education.”

**Teaching about systemic racism and sexism provides a bridge to unite us.** Teaching about systemic racism and sexism is not at all “divisive”—indeed, it’s just the opposite — it lays the groundwork for meaningful unity around the concept that “we the people” must include all of us.

### 2. PLATFORM FOR RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES

**Racial justice activists call out this transparent attempt to equate racial progress with unfair racial stigmatizing of white people.** In the distorted vision of race relations that the crackdown on CRT pivots upon, any forward advance for Black people and other people of color necessitates taking away rights from whites.

### 3. PLATFORM FOR DEMOCRACY/VOTING RIGHTS STAKEHOLDERS

**We must bridge the divide, and unite around our vision for a robust multiracial society that acknowledges systemic racism and the moral imperative to eliminate it.** Anti-CRT attacks are an attempt to further separate us and to sow seeds of racial division. We must come together to continue the project of healing what divides us. Join us in this fight as if our lives depend upon it – because history tells us that they do.

**On August 27-29, Black Lives Matter at School, Zinn Education Project, and the African American Policy Forum unite in a national call** to teachers, students, parents, and community members. This event will mark the return to school by modeling the sort of unity that CRT promotes. Follow #TeachTruth and #TruthBeTold for updates/



# FAQS & ILLUSTRATIONS OF MESSAGE SEQUENCING

1. QUESTION: Is Critical Race Theory currently being taught in K-12 schools?

ANSWER: *Critical race theory originated in law schools, but over time, professional educators and activists in a host of settings--K-12 teachers, DEI advocates, racial justice and democracy activists, among others--applied CRT to help recognize and eliminate systemic racism.* And that's a good thing, because **we must support our teachers' freedom to teach the truth about our accurate history.** But politicians in many states are **attempting to ban teachers from discussing concepts such as "racism" in our public schools, recalling the fanatical purges of the McCarthy-era.** An entire generation subject to these censorship laws is now at risk of being fed lies about American history. **We cannot allow politicians to dumb down public education to satisfy their narrow definition of "patriotic education."**

2. QUESTION: Is Critical Race Theory teaching that all white people are racist or trying to make white students feel guilty?

ANSWER: *The whole point of critical race theory is to challenge stereotypical and essentialist ascriptions of behavior based on race or skin color and to repudiate the idea that we can talk about racism only as a moral failing of individuals.* **One of the biggest lies being spread in this coordinated disinformation campaign is that critical race theory is about labeling individual people "racist."** Critical Race Theory is not the idea that racism is inherent in any human being. When you hear that teachers are using CRT in K-12 schools to label white children as racist oppressors and children of color as hapless victims by virtue of their skin color, that is not Critical Race Theory. Nothing could be further from the truth. **Racial justice activists call out this transparent attempt to equate racial progress with unfair racial stigmatizing of white people.**

3. QUESTION: Doesn't teaching about racism undermine national unity and create divisiveness?

ANSWER: Not at all. In fact, **we should all seek to foster robust classroom conversations and debate about structural inequalities.** Unfortunately, the other side is fomenting division by drawing on far right narrative that stoke white fears of being replaced by Black people, immigrants of color, and other marginalized groups like trans youth. **Once a fringe element outside of mainstream politics, far right extremist strategies now occupy the center of power within the GOP.** Teaching about systemic racism and sexism is not at all "divisive"--indeed, it's just the opposite -- it lays the groundwork for meaningful unity around the concept that "we the people" must include all of us. **Teaching about systemic racism and sexism provides a bridge to unite us.**

4. QUESTION: Why are Republicans and the right-wing media so focused on critical race theory right now?

ANSWER: **The current state-by-state strategies to suppress voting rights, protest, and ideas are interconnected, and together they pose an urgent threat to the continued functioning of America's democracy.** The growing empowerment of racial justice advocates and their allies following the 2020 summer of racial reckoning is deeply threatening to the status quo. **The utter panic manufactured around "critical race theory" seeks to transfer the moral high ground from racial justice movements and other marginalized groups, to the forces determined to defeat such movements.** In the CRT scare, the strategists and funders of the militant right think they've found it. This repressive censorship campaign seeks to ban the discussion of concepts such as "racism" that they arbitrarily deem "unpatriotic." **We must bridge the divide, and unite around our vision for a robust multiracial society that acknowledges systemic racism and the moral imperative to eliminate it.**