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Critical race parenting in the Trump era: a Sisyphian endeavor? A parable

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the complicated decisions parents make when they decide to raise critically conscious children. The article argues that critical parenting in US society is often analogous to the Greek myth of Sisyphus. Using Critical Race Parenting, Critical Race Theory, and Critical Whiteness Studies, this critically interpretive parable looks to the election of Donald Trump as US President and the ways whiteness, patriarchy, sexism, xenophobia, ableism, and racism function in social, cultural, economic, and educational spheres. This parable tells the story of Sue Libertad and analyzes how parenting in the era of Trump is Sisyphian. This concludes with a discussion of the importance of talking about race, racism, and heterosexism with our children, which disrupts whiteness, sexism, and patriarchy, and ultimately Trump and his administration.

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The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor. (Camus, 1955, p. 119)

Introduction

Parenting often feels like ceaseless work, ceaseless rock pushing. For many parents, the rock pushing begins before conception, with the sting of infertility or the bureaucracy of adopting, the struggles finding adequate prenatal health care, and labor and delivery, then continues with breastfeeding, sleep training, toilet training, language acquisition, media influence on children, selecting schools, curriculums, daycare, and so on. This perpetuity is complicated when parents¹ make the decision to raise critically conscious children – purposefully nurturing racial and ethnic identity development.

As critical parents, we would be lying if we said that raising our children we have never felt hopeless and that our parenting has never felt futile as the above quote indicates. In Greek mythology, Sisyphus, the king of Corinth, was punished by the Gods to Hades where he was to repeatedly roll a huge stone up a hill only to have it roll down again as soon as he had brought it to the summit (Camus, 1955; Yamamoto, Serrano, & Rodriguez, 2003). That is not to say that we feel completely condemned, but the choice to have and raise young children of color in the US with its legacy of hate and insistence on assimilation and acquiescence to dominant white norms often feels like condemnation. We are acutely aware of the ‘formidable obstacles... face[d] each day’ in the exhausting and traumatic fight to nurture,

inspire, motivate, protect, and care for our children as parents in a racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, and xenophobic society (Brown, 2011, p. 249).

Never was this feeling more present than the day after the election of Donald Trump. One of the authors, having stayed up nearly all night waiting to see his worst fears come to fruition, sent an early morning text to his teenage daughter, who was at her mother's house, to see how she was doing given the election results. Surprisingly, given the time, she quickly began to text back but no text came over. His phone rang, which was uncommon, since he could count the number of times she had physically called him on the one hand. Picking up the phone, he knew immediately that she had been crying. He proceeded to ask her how she felt and how she was doing. Her searing five-word response will stay with him for the rest of his days. She sobbed out an answer to his questions by saying, 'Dad, you are a fraud!' He was completely floored and utterly unprepared for that response and questioned why she would say such a thing. She responded to him by saying, 'Everything you have ever taught me about the power of your social justice work is a lie! Because the complete opposite was just elected President of the United States.' She then proceeded to cry uncontrollably. After what seemed an eternity, the only thing he told her was that he loved her and would never stop working for her. Looking to Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) as an example, he chose not to console her and remembered the section in his book *Between the World and Me* where he says:

... I heard you crying. I came in five minutes after, and I didn't hug you, and I didn't comfort you, because I thought it would be wrong to comfort you. I did not tell you that it would be okay, because I have never believed it would be okay. What I told you is what your grandparents tried to tell me: that this is your country, that this is your world, that this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it. (p. 2)

As many critical parents did that day, one of our author's never felt more helpless and hopeless, yet he never felt more confirmed in his belief that racism is normal (Bell, 1992) and now overtly tolerated and normalized. In short, he felt like Sisyphus – crushed and cursed by this perpetual critical parenting boulder.

Parables, ParentCrit, CRT, and CWS

Much like Sisyphus of antiquity, in contemporary US society, parenting, and the struggle that accompanies such an endeavor, is perpetual. That is not to say there is not great joy and enduring love that comes from seeing our children grow; however, these moments of happiness are often tempered by our nation's legacy and insistence on destroying the bodies of people of color. In using a Sisyphean analogy, we are not arguing that parenting young children of color is hopeless; however, we are trying to convey the amount of work that accompanies raising these children in the US. What we are also trying to avoid is being overly prescriptive in the use of the analogy. Our hope is that readers come to the analogy from different perspectives. For some readers, there may be a sense of futility in pushing the metaphorical boulder up and down the hill seeing little change along the way, other readers may see the pushing as a form of resistance capital (Yosso, 2005), and still other readers may find joy and comfort in the decent and in the reflection as we prepare to push again. Nevertheless, it is for this reason we look to the myth of Sisyphus as analogy. Gillborn (2005) argues that whites refuse to make central the problem of racism, which is an act of white supremacy. This is an essential topic for this paper and parable, especially because the majority of white people see race as irrelevant in parenting or for understanding their white lives.

With this in mind, Critical Race Parenting (ParentCrit) (Matias & Montoya, 2015) is utilized, as it provides a framework, method, lens, and vocabulary for how we strive to raise our children. ParentCrit is 'an educational praxis that can engage both parent and child in a mutual process of teaching and learning about race, especially ones that debunk dominant messages about race' (Matias, 2016, p. 3). Unlike Critical Race Theory (CRT), ParentCrit does not adhere to tenets. Instead, ParentCrit offers a set of considerations for critically minded parents – as parenting is very nuanced in regard to race, culture, ethnicity, and nation state. The considerations, which will be discussed in greater details in the discussion

section, are: (1) too early is better than too late, (2) critically guided racialization, (3) front-load vocabulary, (4) intersectionality first, (5) question white norms, (6) recognize the reality of violence, and (7) march in resistance (Nishi, 2016, April). Our hope that researchers, educators, parents, and community members look to these considerations as guideposts – potential starting points, but also look to add to and theorize these considerations based on their own parental epistemologies.

The paper also draws upon Derrick Bell's (1992) use of parables and speculative fiction to reveal and animate a nuanced understanding of racism, white privilege, white supremacy, and xenophobia. As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Derrick Bell's (1992) seminal book *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*, we feel a stylistic desire and obligation to pay tribute to the parable method to racial analyses. Parable is a method that was resolutely articulated by Bell (1992) and a style that we feel is deficient in current scholarship that uses CRT as a theoretical lens to examine racism and white supremacy. We argue, as Montoya, Matias, Nishi, and Sarcedo (2015) advance, '[F]iction resonates because it is quite easy for people of color and other marginalized people to find similar examples and experiences in contemporary society' (p. 2). Furthermore, our parable is a counter-narrative in the strictest 'CRT pillar' sense, and is based on specific experiences of one of the authors. Moreover, we want to focus on social science fictions, which we contend are, and as Preston (2014) states, 'more substantive and "real" than the physical universe' (p. 9). For this reason, we choose to focus on parable as a richer unit of analysis rather than emphasize our own counter-narratives.

In order to examine the Sisyphean analogy, this critically interpretive essay draws from CRT and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) in addition to ParentCrit. CRT is utilized because it recognizes the pervasive presence of race and racism and it best situates the saliency of racism in US society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT scholars (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Espino, 2012; Urrieta, Méndez, & Rodríguez, 2015) have identified the following five tenets of CRT: (1) that race and racism are permanent, endemic, and defining to US society; (2) CRT challenges majoritarian narratives, especially claims of colorblindness, objectivity, meritocracy, and equal opportunity; (3) CRT propagates a commitment to social justice; (4) CRT centers people of color's experiential knowledge as valid, legitimate, and appropriate to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination; and (5) CRT analyses are interdisciplinary. As such, each of these tenets informs ParentCrit and its considerations. We argue that parents who decide on a critical approach to raising children of color must attend to these tenets. Furthermore, each of these tenets will be engaged and addressed in the parable.

Additionally, CWS is utilized because it focuses on the hegemonic nature of whiteness and how its exertion (e.g. the election of Donald Trump) maintains a system of oppression and continued white supremacy (Allen, 2004; Leonardo, 2009). CWS is related to the intellectual undertaking of CRT and looks to theorize and problematize the construction of whiteness as an absent racial category and dominant social norm. Whiteness scholars concur that whiteness is linked to institutionalized power and privileges that continually advantage white Americans (Giroux, 1997; Roediger, 2005). A thorough understanding of domination must include an analysis of the complexity of oppression, which must attend to the ways that racism, classism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, and other oppressive systems intersect.

As such, this paper looks to create a *trenza* (braid) (Montoya, 1994) of CRT, ParentCrit, and CWS frameworks to develop a powerful connection between racism within education and decisions to raise critically conscious children of color.

Drawing on the election of Donald Trump as US President and the ways whiteness, patriarchy, sexism, and racism function in social, cultural, economic, and educational spheres, this parable tells the story of Sue Libertad and analyzes how parenting in the era of Trump is reminiscent of Sisyphus. This tireless work presents itself in the daily minutia of parenting, in the fighting to establish an ethnic identity in her children, and reaches a tipping point after a series of traumatic meetings at her daughter's school. This paper will begin with a parable and will conclude with an analysis of the importance of talking about race, racism, and heterosexism with our children, which disrupts whiteness and patriarchy, and ultimately Trump and his administration.

Parable

Sue Libertad crashed onto her couch with tidal wave-like force having finally finished cooking dinner, bathing her toddler, getting lunches and clothes ready for the following day, putting in a load of laundry, and doing three days' worth of dishes. She should probably grade, write, and/or answer emails but she knows that her exhaustion will prevent her from doing anything close to meaningful work. Nevertheless, she decides to attempt to watch, for the fourth time, the first episode of *Insecure*, that her *comadres*² keep telling her about and insisting that she watch.

Saying she was tired is the grossest of understatements as she is feeling the effects of her fifth straight nearly sleepless night. This, on top of nearly 18 months of, at best, lackluster sleep has Sue in a haze that the strongest of coffees cannot touch. Having a sick toddler and a hormonal teenager, plus the pressures of publishing, patriarchy, and tenure politicking as an Assistant Professor of color, has pushed her to the exhaustion breaking point. In these moments, she longs to have a partner to assist, but that longing passes as quickly as it enters her mind as she cannot imagine being in another abusive heteropatriarchal relationship. She has finally begun to find solace in her fluid sexual identity, even if her family, especially her mamá, cannot.

Despite being 10 pounds lighter than she was in high school, she has never felt unhealthier. There seems to be a direct correlation between the bags under her eyes and ensuring that her children are cared-for and insulated from the toxic stress she experiences daily at work. Before having children, she never really thought about the day-to-day minutia of parenting, let alone the pressure and struggles of being a critical parent, or what it means to be a parent of color with the election of Donald Trump. As she thought about her own childhood, she always knew that her upbringing was outside of the norm as it was rooted in social justice and that her parents and grandparents taught her and her siblings to be proud and committed to their *gente, el pueblo, y nuestra raza*³. When she was pregnant with her second child, Sue was extremely excited to hear about this newest branch of Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Parenting (ParentCrit) (Matias & Montoya, 2015; Matias, 2016) as it provided a framework, lens, and vocabulary for how she strived and wanted to raise her children. When she read the considerations, she was relieved to know that other scholars, despite patriarchal pressures, were problematizing raising children in the academy and our racist society, especially with the recent election of Donald Trump.

Nevertheless, her ruthless phone alarm went off just 27 min after she last checked and, as fate would have it, as she finally was on the verge of deep sleep. She will have to attempt that first episode again later this week. Despite all this, she drags herself off the couch and to the kitchen to find the smallest bit of respite from her Keurig. She would never admit it, but since having her youngest child, it pains her that she can no longer afford to splurge on her favorite caffeinated drink, a soy latte Viennese. As such, she packs her reusable K-Cup with discounted off-brand coffee grounds, praying for just a few more glorious minutes of silence, dreading the sound of the abnormally heavy steps from her toddler's room upstairs. He consistently wakes up between five-thirty and six o'clock in the morning, and Sue would give anything for just 10 more minutes of solitude, silence, and caffeine.

Unlike her toddler, Sue's teenage daughter would sleep until midday if allowed, which, unfortunately, means that Sue will soon begin the *mêlée* of getting her daughter out of bed. And today is a day that they cannot be late. Sue's schedule, which is routinely over booked, is even more jam-packed than usual. She has to take her sick son to her sister-in-law's house as he cannot go to daycare with a fever, she has a three-hour department meeting followed by a curriculum meeting, and then back-to-back meetings with her doctoral advisees. She also has to find time to write as she is on deadline for two revise and resubmits, shamefully past deadline regarding revisions for a co-authored piece, and must begin her fellowship application, which could, if awarded, desperately provide much needed funds for her research. Not to mention her third-year review dossier looms and torments her daily. All this must be worked on before she heads out to her daughter's school where Sue is set to meet with the Assistant Principal and three testing coordinators regarding her decision to opt her daughter out of high-stakes testing as well as parent-teacher conferences. During these meetings, she plans to address the offensive lack of readings by people of color, and the incident where a white student in her daughter's AP class

declared that ‘the school will be less crowded after all the illegals will be sent back where they came from and the wall will keep them there.’ Her daughter said she protested but her teacher silenced her, saying that the young man was entitled to his own opinion. Later that day someone also placed a ‘Trump that Bitch’ sticker on her daughter’s locker. She was not going to let this type of abuse go undiscussed.

‘Xóchilt!!! Get up!!! I am not going to tell you again, we CANNOT be late and have to leave in twenty minutes,’ shrieked Sue.

Sue rushed to her car as she was most likely going to be late getting to her daughter’s school. As always, her meetings ran long and she was scrambling to get through the quad to the parking garage, all the while doing traffic calculations in her head trying to figure out the fastest way to get out of downtown. The only thing giving her solace was that her day was not a complete waste. Both department meetings finished early – even though they both could have been emails. Her doc students were prepared and had a great plan for a service project in the spring semester. And she was able to get her R&Rs completed. Sadly, she had not done anything else – especially that cursed dossier. But these days, crossing anything off her extensive to-do list was cause for celebration.

As she got to her car and figured out her route, her thoughts immediately went to her daughter and the school meetings to come. As difficult as it is for Sue raising her teenage daughter, she has always been the brightest and most rewarding aspect of her life. It was never easy, especially given that she had her daughter at 22 years old. She remembered how having a child right out of undergrad was traumatic. The lack of a job, health benefits, income, and support was excruciating. Yet, she was committed to providing the best life possible for her child and immediately began networking, planning, and executing her future.

She remembered during her pregnancy she refused to let doubters and racists get to her. She knew, for many parents of color, the simple act of being pregnant and having children can be seen as negative and stereotypical, thus perpetuating the ‘hyper-fertile’ Latina myth (see Gutiérrez, 2008). She shook off the looks and the snide comments, even from her doctors. ‘We can’t wait to meet dad...’ they would say. ‘Well if you see him, tell him hello for me,’ Sue would reply, in her curtest tone. They soon stopped asking but still gawked and whispered.

She remembered agonizing over what to name her daughter, spending hours at the bookstore pouring through baby name books, back when bookstores were a destination. Struggling between honoring her culture and understanding that her *jita*⁴ would be raised in a racist society with willfully limited white tongues, tongues that settle on stereotypes rather than learn to properly pronounce ethnic sounding names (see Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). She thought of a quote from one of her favorite readings from graduate school, which beautifully declares:

When we chose our daughters’ names we wanted to give them something that they could carry with them, something that they could use as strength, as home, in a world that might not always nurture them as we would want it to. We gave them Nahuatl names. We gave them names that were hundreds of years old that carried with them the prayers of their great grandmothers. Names that represented their own spirits, but that also manifested the spirit of their people. (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 1)

She remembered the difficulty of waiting tables with an infant at home, the shame in applying for welfare and W.I.C.⁵ benefits, and nursing while attending graduate school. She still struggles understanding how so many graduate schools and professors demand silence around parental epistemologies. It still angers her that so many institutions of higher education assume students are not parents and therefore always available. Never was this more present than when she applied for doctoral fellowships. ‘Yeah... like I can spend four weeks away from my daughter...’ Sue scoffed when reading the fellowship details.

She remembered the guilt that she was not present enough to properly teach her daughter Spanish because she spent so much time at daycare with monolingual providers. Nevertheless, beginning in the womb, and as early as her daughter could speak, she never hesitated to talk with her daughter about being *morena*⁶, about colonialism, race, racism, and white supremacy.

She remembered the pride she felt when she spent some of her scholarship money on ‘social justice’ children books for her daughter: books that highlighted the varying intersectional aspects of her identity; books that celebrated her culture, challenged heteronormativity and patriarchy; books that helped her explore her gender.

She remembered the Marades⁷, and rallies akin to Occupy and Black Lives Matter to which she would take her. The importance for her to see people who looked like her standing together in resistance against white supremacy, nation state, and white settler colonialism – never shying away from talking about the historical and contemporary violence that people of color have and continue to endure. She protested with her daughter with immense pride, even when the conservative members of her family would ridicule and question her putting her daughter in harm's way and 'teaching her anti-American beliefs.' She would quickly respond to such nonsense with one of her favorite authors and books, *Notes of a Native Son* by James Baldwin (1955) where he poignantly captured what true critical patriotism looks like in stating: 'I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually' (p. 9).

She remembered insisting on taking her on stage with her as she was hooded and received her PhD. That degree belonged to both of them. 'Fuck your policy that only students can walk on stage,' she remembered thinking as she held her *jita* in defiance and received her degree.

She remembered...

She remembered...

Sue rushed to wipe the streaks from her face as she parked at her daughter's high school. She barely recalled the drive as she attempted to put on some eyeliner and mitigate the even larger bags that had formed under her eyes due to the tears. Surprisingly she had made it on time. She quickly sent a text to her daughter to make sure she got to her cousin's house as planned and proceeded to walk into the school.

Sue got back into her car and sat back down, enraged in such a way she has not been since her daughter's dad decided 'he was not ready for kids' and left to chase his dreams of football. She simply could not believe what transpired in the meeting and during her parent-teacher conferences, specifically the talk with her daughter's AP teacher. She took several deep breaths as she ran through the testing meeting again in her head.

Her meeting with the white Assistant Principal and white testing coordinators went exactly as she anticipated it would. It began with them trying to convince (i.e. guilt) her into having her daughter take the tests. Because if she does not the school runs the risk of losing funding, which 'is actually very selfish of those parents and students who decide not to?' As if the problem with high-stakes testing lies with students and parents and not major school districts, including Washington, D.C.'s school 'reformers' including Michele Rhee and New Orleans' Paul Vallas, whose 'calculating effort[s] look to reshape public education along the lines of the free market' (Au, 2011, p. 34). They followed this flawed reasoning with declaring that she really must *not* understand the function of these types of tests in schools because if she did she would not dare consider opting out. It is for these exact reasons that she does not tell her daughter's teachers or administrators the work she does. As such, she has come to expect these types of deficit perspectives (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) because of her name and phenotype. Their declaration of her perceived ignorance almost makes her laugh out loud as she is colleagues with some of the leading scholars who are publishing scholarship critical of high-stakes testing and has read a plethora of their work detailing how problematic these tests are, especially for marginalized and students of color. She knows that these tests do very little for academic identity, how they narrow curriculums, force teacher-centered pedagogy, and play far too large a role in perceived teacher effectiveness, tenure and promotion, and funding (Au, 2011). All of which she conveys, in her best and most condescending academic voice, to her shocked white audience, channeling her pettiest of side-eyes. After her diatribe, the conversation and their lobbying efforts quickly come to an end and she is promised the appropriate opt-out paper work within the week.

Coming back to her senses, Sue looked at herself in the rearview mirror and chuckled. This misleading action was completely devoid of humor because as frustrating and exhausting as her testing meeting was, it was nothing compared to her conversation with the AP teacher. As someone who teaches, researches, and publishes around issues of race, racism, and white supremacy, Sue, as she has heard

from many of her colleagues, often struggles when dealing with overt racism directed at her. Despite all her training, readings, and theorizing, racists and racist situations are often not easy to deal with. As she sat fuming in her car, she was glad today was not one of those days. Similar to many athletes, she was in the zone today and she went through the events that just took place with her daughter's AP teacher.

She went in wanting to cover three things: (1) the racist comments uttered by a white male student; (2) what was going to be done about the sticker on the locker; and (3) the lack of readings by authors of color. Thankfully she did not have to wait long to see the teacher as there were only two sets of white parents ahead of her. She had long since dismissed the looks she would get showing up to parent-teacher conferences alone, though these looks were never missed upon her. As she sat and listened to the benign and cloying conversations between the white parents and AP teacher, she was excited and filled with anticipation, excited that this white conversational harmony was soon to be disrupted by a self-identified ParentCrit. As the parents finally left, after what Sue deemed as the longest and fakest goodbyes, Sue walked in to greet the teacher.

Despite having met her several times, and emailed her even more, the teacher asked in the most faux surprising tone, 'Oh, hello...Who is your child? Are they in my class?'

'Xóchilt Libertad' Sue explained.

'Who?' questioned the teacher, looking quite confused.

'Xóchilt Libertad,' said Sue, refusing to relent on the Spanish pronunciation.

'Oh...Xo!' exclaimed the teacher after a long pause, explaining that is what they call her in class since it is easier for her and her fellow students.

'I have no idea who that is, but I am here to talk about my daughter Xóchilt, and I would appreciate it if you called her by her full name,' declared Sue, not allowing the offensive abbreviation to go unaddressed.

'Oh ok, well, let me look up her grade' said the teacher sheepishly, opening her laptop.

'There is no need to do that, I know exactly what her grade is,' Sue said cutting off the teacher.

I am actually here to talk about a few other things. First, about the comments that were made in your class a few days ago regarding Trump and the expulsion of immigrants. Xóchilt said that these comments were made and not addressed in class,

continued Sue not hiding her curtness.

'I *did* talk to Xóchilt after class and told her not to worry about it' answered the teacher.

Sue hesitated to pounce on that lazy and dangerous response and simply asked, 'Why would you to tell her to not "worry" about it? And why would you not address it in front of the entire class?'

'Well, I don't find it productive to get into race conversations in my class as they often derail the conversation and move us away from the curriculum and meaningful conversation' exclaimed the teacher, with more fervor and attitude than previously.

Sue could no longer hide her anger, but responded with restraint, although audibly louder than before,

Listen, I do not think it appropriate for you, a white woman, to tell a young woman of color, that she should not 'worry' about a young man echoing racist comments from a Presidential candidate. Given her racial identity, she *has* to worry about it and simply cannot be willfully ignorant to the painful racist reality that we live in. For you, her teacher, and an AP teacher at that, to tell her not to worry about such vitriol is not only dangerous it is reprehensible.

Sue took a calming breath and continued,

'Furthermore, for you to dismiss classroom dialogue about race as 'unproductive' is shameful. And while I know Xóchilt is the only Latina in the class, your decision to do this conveys to her that her experience with racism is unimportant and a disruption. By doing this, you render her responsible and force her to internalize such negative experiences in your class devoid of any support. And while you may think this the right thing to do, your silence in this case is placating and supporting racist behavior.'

'I have to stop you right there!' protested the teacher.

I do not support racism of any kind. I teach my students that the color of your skin does not matter and promote that we are all of one race, the human race! I'm very sorry, and with all due respect, but I just do not think you know about classroom teaching and what is required of us to maintain classroom management. And quite frankly, Xóchilt's insistence and *always* bringing up race *is* a distraction.

said the teacher, now red-faced.

As with the testing coordinators, Sue was quite used to having educators assume that she knows nothing of pedagogy, policy, or classrooms.

What I do know, is that your silence is not neutral. And know that your advice to my daughter was anything but neutral. And your insistence to avoid race dialogue in your class is a political act. I know you heard about the sticker that was placed on my daughter's locker as you were invited to our meeting this coming Friday. I am curious what your thoughts are about that, especially since we know it was placed there by the same student who made the comments in your class?

asked Sue.

I do not think we should make a bigger deal about this, than it has to be. I will tell you, like I told the principal. I think it is simply kids being kids, and that they really do not know or mean what they are saying. Also, these students have the right to their own opinions. Do you not think they have that First Amendment right? Or does safe space only apply to people like your daughter?

she asked with a smirk.

Without immediately responding, Sue stood up and walked to the door and turned around at the last second and said, 'I was going to talk to you about lack of readings by authors of color, but I think I can conclude your thoughts about their place in your curriculum without asking.'

'Perhaps you should talk to the district about which books are deemed worthy of reading, because my list mirrors theirs,' said the teacher with lips pursed.

I will, and we will talk more about this on Friday during our meeting with the principal... Oh by the way, I think I forgot to mention, the Principal is one of my students. She is finishing her doctorate at the University I am a professor at.... See you Friday,

said Sue, mimicking the tone of the previous parents.

Having gone over it again in her head, and now bathing in her mic-drop, Sue felt better, despite her perpetual frustration with the schooling system. She was able to gather herself, put on her favorite matte lipstick, played Solange's *Cranes* in the Sky as loud as possible, and drove to pick up her amazing children.

Is ParentCrit a Sisyphean endeavor? An analytical discussion

A parable is defined as a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson (Parable, *n. d.*). This parable presents the argument that Critical Race Parenting in the US in the face of relentless racism, microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007), sexism, and ableism is Sisyphean – that is, perpetual. While the idea of such a nihilistic perpetuity around parenting may be far-fetched for some parents reading this paper, the parable nonetheless examines how taking a ParentCrit approach to raising our children, especially children of color, requires an attention and focus that can often be exhausting. For example, in the parable, Sue agonizes over what to name her unborn daughter, torn between cultural identity and white gaze (Fanon, 1967). Inherent in her struggle is a desire to celebrate cultural identity and intricate understanding of dominant white norms. For many ParentCrits, we understand the educational (see Kohli & Solórzano, 2012) and employment (see Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004) risks involved when we choose to bestow ethnic names on our children. This type of struggle is not only traumatic but arduous. We can look to Matias' (2016) work regarding how this plays out. Matias argues that ParentCrits must 'begin to deconstruct race, beginning with our own children so that they do not grow up recycling or internalizing dominant messages of race...' (p. 3). This plays out in the parable when the AP teacher presents Sue with her daughter's English sounding nickname and abbreviation. What the teacher, and often larger society, fails to recognize is that this renaming exercise is an act of cultural violence. As Kohli and Solórzano (2012) posit, 'When a child goes to school and their name is mispronounced or changed, it can negate the thought, care and significance of the name, and thus the identity of the child' (p. 4). Sadly, this assault is not often understood by the child. One of the authors, a Chicano male, had his named changed in grade school, and was not able to reclaim his birth name until well into his 30s. This bastardization of his name was never challenged as neither he nor his mother had the agency at

the time to challenge this decision. In addition, the author's mother, like many of her generation, was steeply committed to taking an assimilationist approach to daily life and schooling.

Nevertheless, ParentCrits, who have the agency to understand white norms, make the conscious decision to do double the amount of parental work juxtaposed to parents who choose a colorblind (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) or race-mute⁸ (Sue, 2016) approach to parenting. What ParentCrits also do is ensure their children inherit this racial struggle – thus the rock rolls down again.

ParentCrit as pedagogy and method

As the parable conveys, the ParentCrit struggle begins in the womb and relentlessly infiltrates all areas of development. However, this work need not be done without assistance and guidance. In the Iliad, Homer declares Sisyphus 'the craftiest of men' (Graziosi & Haubold, 2010, p. 119). While 'craftiness' is often seen and defined as negative, which was also the case for Sisyphus, ParentCrits need not internalize the negative aspects of such a term. For in the face of whiteness and white supremacy, that which Mills (2007) articulates as a falsity, ParentCrits must look to all available tools. For this, we argue that educators and critical parents look to the ParentCrit considerations for guidance. For these considerations are not only crafty, but also pragmatic and a way to disrupt whiteness, sexism, and patriarchy, and ultimately Trump and his administration. As such, what follows is a discussion of the ParentCrit consideration and how they played out in the paper and parable, and the importance of implementing them with our children.

It should be pointed out that we do not present these considerations in any particular or strict order. Again, parenting is very situational and often parents come to ParentCrit at different times in their children's lives. However, if pressed, we would argue that, if possible, this first consideration an appropriate place to start. For many parents and educators, talking about racism and other oppressive systems to young children seems antithetical and taints their innocence. For many ParentCrits, this willful *naïveté* is simply not afforded to them and if utilized does far more harm than good, as it prepares their racialized and pigmented children for a world that does not exist. What white parents and assimilated parents of color do not realize is that their decision to take colorblind approaches does not negate a racialized upbringing. For example, as Matias (2014) illustrates, white children can distinguish racial subtleties as early as the age of three, as showcased by Clark and Clark (1939)⁹; thus, as Thandeka (2000) affirms, white children are also racialized into whiteness. As Matias continues, 'Although white children bear witness to race, their acceptance into the white community and into whiteness, in general, is predicated by rejecting race perceptions and feigning colorblindness' (p. 8). In the parable, Sue demonstrates the antithesis of this colorblind parental approach. She talked with her daughter, as early as being in the womb, about being dark skinned, about the hyper-sexualization of Latinas and women of color, and insisted on providing her with a language to understand, explain, diagnose, and critique these oppressive systems. This 'too early is better than too late' approach, despite the difficulty, is crucial to ParentCrit, and something that parents and educators must adopt, thus moving away from the 'they are too young to understand' rationale, which is often more about placating parental and educator uneasiness.

The second consideration, like many of the others, has overlap. For example, as previously discussed, naming our children is not merely arduous, but it is also an act of critically guided racialization. For example, Sue agonizing over what to name her daughter illustrates this process. Her decision on selecting a Nahuatl name for her daughter, ultimately refusing to acquiesce to limited white tongues, is an act of guided racialization. Furthermore, critically guided racialization must be nurtured, for if not it often manifests in a 'cycle of internalized racism' and requires, as Matias (2014) declares, a need for 'a pedagogy for parenting...critical race parenting' (p. 28).

In addition, and answering Matias' aforementioned declaration, Sue's decision to provide and read socially just and race-focused children's books attends to many of the ParentCrit considerations. Doing this guides critical racialization, front-loads vocabulary, and looks to intersectionality first. Regarding intersectionality, often children may make the decision to talk about gender instead of race (see Nishi, 2016); unlike many adults, this semantic move (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) is not utilized as avoidance but as a way to better understand the varying aspects of difference. Using children books to guide this complex

understanding of identity prepares our children to map and ultimately disrupt the 'broad-scale system of domination' that erodes at our intersectional of said identities (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1241).

The last example from the parable addresses the last three considerations. Sue's meeting at the school and conversation with her daughter's AP teacher questioned white norms, recognized the reality of violence, and showcased what it is to march in resistance. James Baldwin (1985) once said, 'Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them' (p. 208). This certainly plays out with the white student's comments about crowding and 'illegals' being sent back. This type of vitriol is not innate and is learned. This type of white identity politics, which often starts with parents, is gradually taught and learned during childhood (Thandeka, 2000; Matias, 2014). Thankfully this imitation works both ways, as illustrated by Sue's daughter who protested the racist outburst. This type of resistance capital (Yosso, 2005) illustrates what it means to question white norms and is vital to being a ParentCrit. This questioning of white norms, and example of resistance capital, is also illustrated via Sue's decision and rationale to opt her daughter out of testing.

Lastly, helping our children recognize the reality of violence is a conversation that parents often have little say over timing. For example, in the parable, Sue's daughter has a 'Trump that Bitch' sticker placed on her locker in response to challenging the Trump comments in her AP class. This is an act of violence, and it is Sue's responsibility to help her daughter unpack what is meant by this slogan and the action of placing it on her locker. In helping her daughter understand the historical violence against women of color, Sue decided to help her daughter understand the reality of violence and not shelter her from it. This is why she was so upset that her teacher told her that it was simply 'kids being kids' and not to 'worry' about the entire incident. What this misguided argument does is negate the reality of racism and violence of such an action. Sue's insistence to hold her daughter's teachers accountable for allowing such behavior in her class and her subsequent rationale for not stopping it is the definition of marching in resistance with her daughter.

Conclusion/closings

As Leonardo (2013) so expertly illuminates, 'Race thought is never easy – it is full of tension, ripe with contradictions, and needs all the help it can recruit. The analysis should be as complex as the topic itself' (p. xv). As such, let us then be complex and crafty ParentCrits in the face of whiteness, white supremacy, patriarchy, sexism, xenophobia, ableism, racism, and other forms of oppression. Inherent in ParentCrit is that we choose to not lie to our children about the reality of the world and the oppression that exists. In making this decision, we may condemn ourselves to a Sisyphean existence – perhaps a life of strife and turmoil. However, as Camus (1955) asserts, 'Myths are made for the imagination to breathe life into them' (p. 120). And in these last parts of the paper, we look to imagine in another way. As for this myth, we can choose to merely see the effort and futility of pushing the stone a hundred times over, focusing only the perpetuity and futility of Critical Race Parenting. However, like Camus (1955), who complexifies the myth by not only focusing on the struggle up but by also focusing on the decent. As he says:

At the very end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward the lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain. It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me... I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end... that is the hour of consciousness... If the descent is thus sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy. (pp. 121–122)

Let us then, as ParentCrits, not only focus on the struggle up, which, with the election of Donald Trump, will require immense effort and attention, but also channel our inner Sue Libertad and become parents and educators who adopt a ParentCrit approach and be stronger than our rocks.

Notes

1. Parent for the purpose of this paper is a person who is entrusted with the care of the person or property, or both, of another, as a minor or someone legally incapable of managing his or her own affairs. Including but limited to: biological parents, adoptive parents, guardians, care-takers, siblings, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and extended family.
2. A friend and co-mother.
3. Our people, our community, and our race.
4. Daughter.
5. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides Federal grants to States for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, nursing, and non-nursing postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five.
6. Darker skinned.
7. Combination 'march' and 'parade'.
8. We understand and are acutely aware that the terms 'colorblind' and 'mute' can be interpreted as ableist. Our usage is not to promote ableism but to include specific scholarship that addresses issues of race avoidance.
9. Robin Bernstein, a professor of African and African American studies and women, gender, and sexuality, presented a critique of the historic study at a W.E.B. DuBois Institute Colloquium, revisited and revalidated the original test results.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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