

Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing? a reply to Dave Hill's 'Race and Class in Britain: a critique of the statistical basis for critical race theory in Britain'

David Gillborn

Institute of Education, University of London, England.

Abstract

This paper is a reply to an earlier piece by Dave Hill, in this journal, that attacked critical race theory (CRT) in general and my own work in particular. I begin with a brief introduction to CRT which highlights the differences between the reality, of a broad and dynamic approach, as opposed to the simple and monolithic version constructed by Hill. In particular, I show that the CRT concept of 'White supremacy' is more nuanced and fluid than the common-sense understanding of that term which Hill applies. I then respond, in turn, to each of Hill's main accusations: namely, that I systematically 'misrepresent' statistical data, especially in relation to social class inequalities, and 'ignore' the attainments of Indian students. These are serious accusations and I demonstrate that they are without any foundation in truth, but rather reflect fundamental inadequacies in Hill's own understanding of racism, CRT and basic descriptive statistics.

Introduction

The endless categorisations. What the Race theorists don't grasp is, unlike class, 'race' is a social construction. It has no basis in the material world: science has long revealed to us that there is [no] biological basis to 'race'. Conversely, class is more than a constructed category. It refers to real, historical, material relations. The social mechanisms that give rise to the various historical expressions of 'racism' lie deep in class relations. (Grant Banfield, personal communication quoted in Hill 2009a: 25)[1]

A section of Dave Hill's paper called 'theoretical analyses' ends with this quotation. It is an appropriate place to begin my response because it signifies the enormous gulf between scholars seeking to apply critical race theory (CRT) and some of their critics who privilege a class-based theory of society. It is a quotation of breath-taking arrogance and naivety. The distinction is drawn between *class* which is seen as 'real' and *race* which, as 'a social construction', is assumed to lack any basis in 'the material world': even the term *racism* is placed in scare quotes as if its status is somehow questionable.

Anyone who takes the time to read CRT itself (rather than the caricatures peddled by some detractors) will be well aware that critical race theorists are fully cognisant of the fact that race is a social construction; this is actually a cornerstone of the approach (Delgado &

Stefancic 2001). However, a key point is that the constructivist nature of race makes it no less *real* in terms of its social, political and economic consequences. Is Banfield (and by implication Hill) really suggesting that racist inequities are not ‘real, historical, material relations’? Indeed, does the quotation imply a belief in class as something other than a social construct, a category (unlike race) that has a ‘biological basis’?

Banfield’s misreading of race/racism is highly problematic; it is as if racist inequity (which impacts on minoritized groups from birth to death) is some sort of chimera, a kind of ideological trick of the light by which things that look like race inequity are actually reducible to class. In his consideration of recent Marxist attacks on CRT, Paul Warmington describes this approach as “‘Race is not real’ fundamentalism’ (2009: 2). Drawing on a range of critical race scholarship, Warmington notes that ‘in orthodox Marxism, race is conceptually dissolved into class relations’ (2009: 3): He quotes Zeus Leonardo as follows:

‘As Fanon finds: “A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening” (1967, p.31). Thus it is not only understandable but also reasonable that the orthodox branding of the racial imagination as ‘false consciousness’ does not sit well with non-white subjects. It occludes white power and privilege, and the interests that maintain them.’ (Leonardo 2004: 485, quoted in Warmington 2009: 3).

Elsewhere in his critique Dave Hill acknowledges that racism exists – ‘I am not denying racism and its perniciousness and pervasiveness’ (2009a : 23) - but the acknowledgement is no more than that, a fleeting gesture of recognition, amid a critique that continually, and explicitly, seeks to subsume race inequity and antiracist struggles, beneath a dominant class-based narrative:

This class perspective ... would unite various socialist political parties, groups, individuals, with trade unions. That is, to prioritise working class issues on behalf of / with the ‘raced’ and gendered working class. This view, that I am advancing here, is to fight the class struggle for all workers, black, white, brown, or, to echo the anti-fascist slogan of the 1970s, ‘black and white unite and fight, smash the National Front’. (Hill 2009a: 27)

Hill’s preferred analysis and political strategy, therefore, explicitly privileges a class-based narrative ‘on behalf of’ racialized minorities and harks back to an imaginary golden age of

unified struggle in the 1970s. This is highly significant because it betrays Hill's failure to comprehend that CRT began life in the 1970s as an explicit reaction against the constant marginalization of race inequities, within Critical Legal Studies (CLS), beneath exactly this kind of supposedly united class-based approach: a perspective that Kimberlé Crenshaw terms 'racial condescension' (2002: 1357). In essence, Dave Hill celebrates the very approach that incited critical race scholars to find a new path, free from the we-know-what's-best-for-you restrictions that they experienced at the hands of class theorists. Crenshaw describes one of the pivotal events that led to the creation of CRT when, at a 1985 CLS conference, she and colleagues tried to argue that 'interrogating whiteness is an important dimension of any critical discourse on race':

this cutting-edge intervention was not well received, particularly by some of the white male heavies of CLS. Amid the vocal resistance was the charge that we were "mau-mauing" CLS and that the framework we had introduced certainly would tear the organization apart ... I was struck not simply by the apparent contradiction between the CLS rhetoric ... and its own resistance to the interrogation we were demanding, but also by the dismissive rejection of the discourse as something they had already done and were not going to do anymore. As some folks explained it, this "been there, done that" attitude was a contemporary response to various offences suffered by white radicals at the hands of African American activists in the 1960s (Crenshaw 2002: 1355).

Hill's position also highlights a failure to understand CRT's perspective on the importance of the experiential knowledge of people of color (Bell 1992). As Zeus Leonardo observes (above) to assume that a class-based approach, led predominantly by White men, can legitimately speak and act 'on behalf of' minoritized groups is more than a little problematic.

In view of the evident gulf in perspectives, readers might be forgiven for questioning the value of yet another critique-reply cycle. I do not imagine that this reply will change Dave Hill's mind about any of the key questions; for example, Hill does not cite my reply to an earlier attack by fellow Marxist writer Mike Cole (Gillborn 2009a). Strangely, however, he *does* cite both Cole's original attack *and* his reply to my reply (Cole 2009a & b). Perhaps Hill didn't read my reply or else found nothing of value in it. My principal intended audience, therefore, is readers who remain open minded about critical race theory and a more critically oriented approach to understanding and opposing the intersectional realities of raced, classed,

gendered and disablist processes in contemporary education. For that reason I begin with a brief outline of CRT, followed by a response to each of Hill's main criticisms.

Critical Race Theory: a short primer

CRT began in the 1970s and 1980s as a movement of radical scholars, mostly people of minoritized backgrounds, working in US law schools. It was introduced into educational studies in the mid 1990s (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995). There is no single canonical statement of CRT but certain elements have emerged as central themes that characterize the movement. The first of these is the central role accorded to racism, which is seen as a subtle and pervasive force in society that is so deep rooted as to appear 'normal' to the majority. Hence CRT does not limit its understanding of racism to crude and violent acts of obvious race hatred; it highlights forms of racism that constitute 'business-as-usual' for the majority but which actively close down opportunities for minoritized people (Delgado & Stefancic 2000: xvi).

CRT is also characterized by a radical critique of liberalism, which points to the failure of notions such as 'merit', 'neutrality' and 'color-blindness'. These ideas masquerade as fair and just but, because of the uneven playing field of contemporary racist society, actually function to ensure the continuation of race inequality.

Building on a long tradition of oral histories and subversive counter-storytelling, CRT writers sometimes adopt a narrative approach and, distinctively, they give particular prominence to the experiential knowledge of people of colour (Delgado 1989). This has been a point of controversy with the academic mainstream but reflects CRT's constructivist view of knowledge and its determination to challenge the common-sense assumptions that often encode majoritarian interests. This deep commitment to promoting real change in the position of minoritized groups is a central tenet of CRT and fuels its disenchantment with traditional notions of civil rights progress. Critical race scholars draw inspiration from their activist predecessors but they are far from content with the scale of changes that have been won to date. Indeed, a central concept is the 'interest convergence principle' which notes the hidden benefits to White people at the heart of even the most celebrated civil rights cases (see Bell 1992).

CRT is a vibrant and changing movement. It is characterized by the development of a range of off-shoot perspectives, such as Latina/o CRT ('LatCrit') and Critical Race Feminism (Delgado & Stefancic 1998; Wing 1997; Yosso 2005). Each perspective reflects key aspects of foundational CRT but also adds distinctive elements of its own. The interchange between these perspectives is frequently unpredictable, often highly productive and, almost always, respectful and grounded in a firm grasp of the work that has gone before. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of all critiques, especially those that over-simplify and caricature CRT itself. For readers who wish to explore CRT in more detail there are several books and articles that provide an accurate and informative overview of the approach (Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Gillborn 2006, 2008; Ladson-Billings 1998; Lynn & Parker 2006; Solórzano & Yosso 2002; Tate 1997) in addition to edited collections that pull together the foundational texts in legal CRT (Crenshaw et al 1995; Delgado & Stefancic 2000, 2007), Critical Race Feminism (Wing 1997) and CRT in education (Taylor et al 2009).

Dave Hill's critique fluctuates between specific criticisms of my work as an individual writer and more general statements about CRT as an approach. And yet almost every specific example relates solely to me. The only other critical race theorist to appear in Hill's bibliography is John Preston, and Hill's statements frequently present my work as emblematic of the entire approach. For example, in a section entitled 'What Critical Race Theorists Show about Education and Achievement in England and Wales', Hill focuses explicitly on my work but generalizes '...Critical Race Theorists, for example in statistics supplied to the *Times Educational Supplement* ...' (Hill 2009a: 4). This is an odd stylistic device: perhaps it is meant to show that Hill's points are not a personal attack, or maybe it serves to inflate the significance of his views as addressing an entire movement, rather than a single UK-based proponent. It certainly discredits his claim to offer a critique of CRT in any general sense. In any case, I wish to stress that in replying to Hill's points I do not claim to speak for critical race theorists en masse. As I have noted, there is no single dogmatic version of CRT.

White Supremacy: fact and fiction

Although Critical Race scholarship differs in object, argument, accent, and emphasis, it is nevertheless unified by two common interests. The first is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained .

. . The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it (Crenshaw et al., 1995: xiii).

The notion of ‘White supremacy’ occupies a central role in CRT but the term is used in a particular way that differs from its usual understanding in mainstream writing. Whereas the term commonly refers to individuals and groups who engage in the crudest, most obvious acts of race hatred (such as extreme nationalists and neo-Nazis), in CRT the more important, hidden, and pervasive form of White supremacy lies in the operation of forces that saturate the everyday mundane actions and policies which shape the world in the interests of White people:

[By] ‘white supremacy’ I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings (Ansley, 1997: 592).

Within CRT, therefore, White supremacy is a complex and nuanced phenomenon. The interests and attitudes of White people occupy centre stage but not in an obvious, crude and monolithic fashion (see Mills 1997, 2003). For example, CRT scholars have examined the operation of ‘model minority’ myths which systematically misrepresent the achievements of certain minoritized groups as a means of both denigrating less successful groups and arguing that such success demonstrates the eradication of racism (see Delgado & Stafancic 2001; Gillborn 2008). Similarly, neither myself nor any CRT scholar whose work I know, asserts that all White people are equally privileged simply on the basis of their assumed racial identification. I have made this point explicitly in several places:

All White-identified people are implicated in these relations but they are *not* all active in identical ways and they do *not* all draw similar benefits – but they *do* all benefit, whether they like it or not (Gillborn 2008: 34 original emphases, see also Gillborn 2009a: 128).

One of the core concepts in CRT demonstrates a sensitivity to both the historic and contemporary intersections of class and race politics: the ‘interest-convergence principle’ suggests that advances in race equality only come about when White elites see the changes as in their own interests. It is important to note that interest-convergence does not envisage a rational and balanced negotiation, between minoritized groups and White power holders, where change is achieved through the mere force of reason and logic. Rather, history suggests that advances in racial justice must be won, through protest and mobilization, so that taking action against racism becomes the lesser of two evils for White interests because an even greater loss of privilege might be risked by failure to take action. CRT, therefore, recognizes that White supremacy is sometimes advanced through moves which appear, superficially at least, to *set back* White interests. Furthermore, Derrick Bell, who created the concept, has always been clear that lower class White interests are likely to be the first to be sacrificed; indeed, Richard Delgado has described the interest-convergence principle as a theory that ‘explains the twists and turns of blacks’ fortunes in terms of the *class* interests of *elite* whites’ (Delgado 2007: 345 emphasis added):

Racial remedies may ... be the outward manifestations of unspoken and perhaps subconscious judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted, will secure, advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle and upper class whites. (Bell 1980: 253)

Hence, the interest-convergence principle is centrally about an intersectional analysis of race/class interests. It views *non-elite* Whites as a kind of buffer, or safety zone, that secures the interests of elite Whites, especially when challenged by high profile race equality/civil rights campaigns (see Gillborn 2008; 2010). Unfortunately, none of this subtlety or contextual specificity is present in Dave Hill’s version of CRT: judging by his article, Hill assumes that ‘White supremacy’ means that White groups must, by definition, surpass *all* minoritized groups:

This is one of the two key tables I am presenting. It compares White academic attainment at GCSE level not just with low performing groups, but with other minority groups, too! And it shows that while Whites (as a whole - rich and poor, all social classes/ strata) outperform most minority groups, they do not outperform them all. (Hill 2009a: 13 original emphasis)

Hill, therefore, reads White supremacy as equating to its crudest common-sense understanding: he assumes that if we were living in a state of White supremacy then White students would, in his terms, have to ‘outperform them all’. This perspective patently refuses to engage with what critical race scholars *actually* say about White supremacy and simply asserts his own erroneous understanding. This is absolutely crucial because the substance of Hill’s entire critique rests on this point: he asserts that I ‘misrepresent’ statistics, ‘ignore’ Indian educational success and make ‘questionable’ assumptions about social class, all in order to sustain the fiction of White supremacy. I will refute each of these claims in turn but it is worth remembering that the very notion of White supremacy at the heart of Hill’s critique bears no resemblance to the concept as it features in my own work nor that of other critical race theorists.

Accusations of Statistical Misrepresentation

Dave Hill’s critique (2009a) is an amended version of a paper he gave earlier that same year at a conference on CRT in the UK. Although most of the substantive points remain unaltered, the published version uses somewhat more measured language than the original: hence, I am no longer accused of ‘statistical skullduggery’ or having ‘fiddled’ the statistics in order ‘to prove CRT’s point in England’ (Hill 2009b). Nevertheless, the paper is clear in its repeated accusation that I have seriously (perhaps knowingly) misrepresented statistical data:

In this paper I critique what I analyse as *the misuse of statistics* in arguments put forward by some Critical Race Theorists in Britain... (Hill 2009a: 2, emphasis added)

I welcome the anti-racism that CRT promulgates and analyses, while criticising its over-emphasis on ‘white supremacy’ - and its *statistical misrepresentations*.’ (ibid. pp. 2-3, emphasis added)

Working class achievement is *misrepresented* by a narrow focus on contiguous strata. (ibid. p. 4, emphasis added)

I question what I see as the *misleading statistics*... (ibid. p. 4, emphasis added)

Anti-racism is too important to be the subject of *flawed and misleading statistics*. (ibid. p. 28, emphasis added)

In the following sections I answer the claims of misrepresentation in relation to Indian students and social class inequity but first it is instructive to examine a further accusation of malpractice in relation to statistics because it raises fundamental questions about Hill's basic competence in relation to such data.

Several of Dave Hill's illustrations are taken directly from my work (presumably from slides that have been posted on the internet): he even retains the Institute of Education logo. The slides also include my statement about the source of the data that I present but, on two occasions, he appears to *correct* me. Hill's Figure 8 includes my original citation of the source material plus his own additional note in parenthesis:

Source: Department for Education & Skills (DfES) (2006a) *National Curriculum Assessment, GCSE and Equivalent Attainment and Post-16 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England 2005/06*. SFR 46/2006, London, DfES, table 32.

(actually, this is not table 32, it is table 7 at www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000708/SFR04_2007v1.pdf (Hill 2009a: 11))

Later in his paper Hill repeats the assertion that he knows my sources better than me and cites the same online link:

Online at www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000708/SFR04_2007v1.pdf- the source actually for Gillborn's various sets of statistics ... (ibid p. 22)

These are important statements because, to a reader who doesn't take the time to check the substance of the original statistical reports, it appears that Hill has detected some sort of error in my use of data and is offering a technical correction. But Hill is wrong in every respect. The statistical values reported in the chart (which Hill reproduces as his Figure 8) are indeed taken from the source I cited (they can be viewed – in table 32 – here <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000693/Addition1V1.xls>). But this is not the most serious aspect of Hill's 'correction' because readers who consult his suggested true source for the data will be disappointed to discover that it is *impossible* to construct the chart from the data he references. Hill's source (table 7 at www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000708/SFR04_2007v1.pdf: Hill 2009a: 11) lists

GCSE achievement *separately* by ethnicity (for each sex and in total) and by free school meal status: there is no cross-tabulation showing differences in attainment by ethnic origin, gender *and* free school meal status. Not only is it impossible to construct the chart from Hill's source but none of the individual values represented in the chart even appear in his cited document.

Dave Hill's suggestion that I have given an incorrect source for my data, therefore, points to some deeply worrying aspects in his own use of statistics. Specifically, he incorrectly asserts an error on my part, and then compounds the problem by giving a source of his own that could not possibly construct the chart in question.

The Educational Attainment of Indian Students

One of Dave Hill's principal objections to my work is that I supposedly 'ignore' the higher than average achievement of Indian students:

With respect to 'race' and educational attainment, what is the validity of ignoring the presence of the (high achieving) Indian/ Indian heritage group of pupils- one of the two largest minority groups in England and Wales? (Hill 2009a: 2)

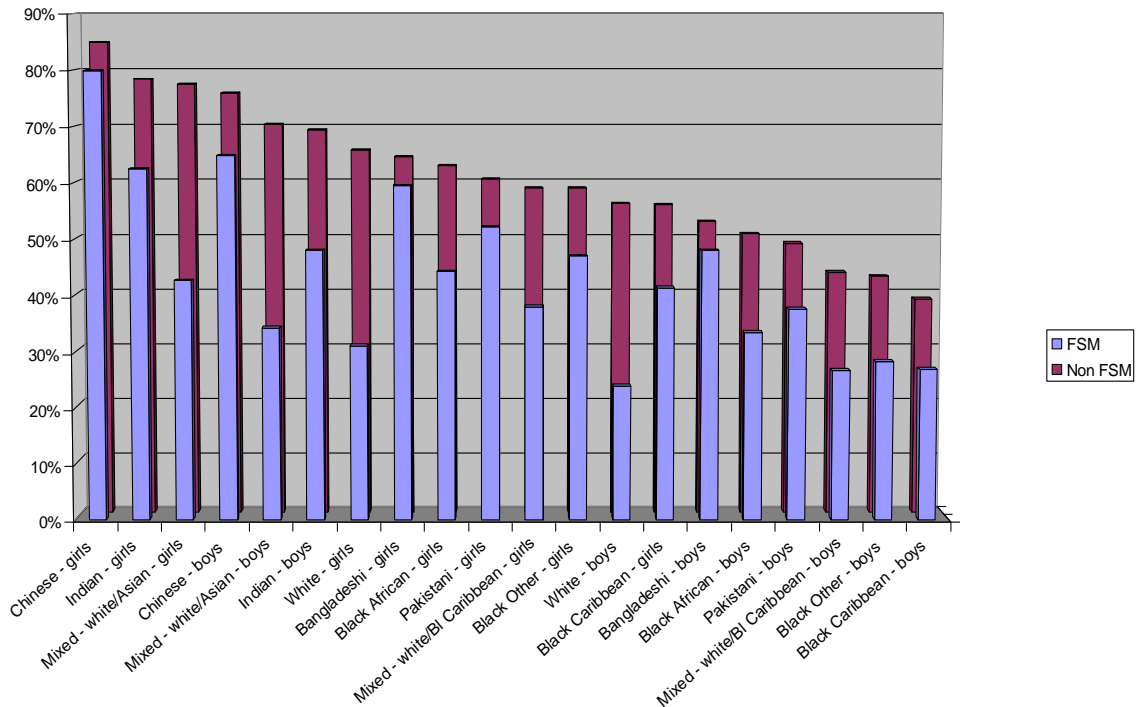
... in publications by David Gillborn (2008a, 2009 a, b, c), the high achieving and large Indian heritage population of England and Wales is rendered invisible. (ibid. p. 4)

The first of my publications cited in the quotation above is my book, *Racism and Education: coincidence or conspiracy?* (Gillborn 2008). Anyone who has read that book, or even glanced at its index, will be surprised by the suggestion that it renders Indian students 'invisible'. For example, in chapter 3 I examine the patterns of educational attainment associated with race, gender and social class. The chapter includes a chart entitled 'Educational achievement by race, class and gender' which takes up a whole page (Gillborn 2008: 54): I reproduce the chart below as Figure 1. The second illustration below (figure 2) is Dave Hill's chart (Hill 2009a: 13). Hill considers this to be one of the most damning aspects of his critique because 'it shows that while Whites (as a whole - rich and poor, all social

classes/ strata) outperform most minority groups, they do not outperform them all' (Hill 2009a: 13). A comparison of figures 1 and 2 is highly instructive.

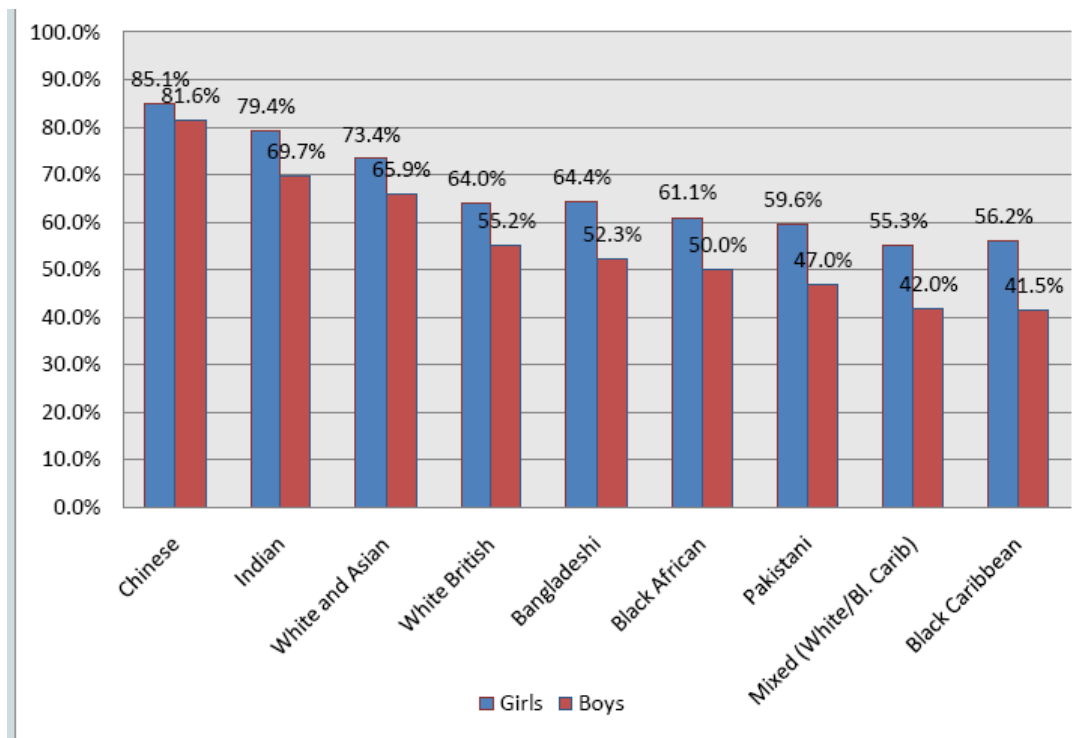
Figure 1 (which I published in one of the sources that Hill accuses of 'ignoring' Indian students) not only includes every one of the ethnic groups that feature in Hill's chart (figure 2) but also includes additional information (the data are broken down by free school meals [FSM] status and include students categorized as 'Black Other').

Figure 1: Educational achievement by race, class and gender: England, 2006 (5+ A* to C grade GCSEs) as presented by Gillborn (2008: 55).



Source: DfEE 2006 (table 32) in Gillborn 2008: exhibit 3.5 (p. 54)

Figure 2: Dave Hill's (2009) chart on achievement by gender and ethnicity



Source: Hill 2009a: figure 11, p. 13 (reproduced with permission)

Hill's claim that his chart reveals something that is absent in my book, is patently incorrect. It is a shame that this part of my book appears to have escaped Hill's attention because the relevant analysis is especially pertinent to his criticism of CRT and his proposals for a 'class perspective' that would 'prioritise working class issues on behalf of/ with the 'raced' and gendered working class' (Hill 2009a : 27). My chart appears in a section entitled '*Class is not equally important for all groups*' (Gillborn 2008: 53-5) where I offer the following commentary on the data:

Within these broad class- and gender-based trends, however, lie some important variations. It is clear that FSM status is associated with much more dramatic variations in attainment for some groups: in particular, White students and their peers of Dual Heritage (White/Asian) background are the only groups where the FSM/Non-FSM gap is 25 percentage points or higher. This suggests that *an exclusive focus on inequalities associated with class profile would be of most benefit to White students – where class inequalities are most pronounced.* (Gillborn 2008: 55 original emphasis)

In addition to the statistical coverage of Indian students' attainments, my book also focuses on these students' experiences of racism as an almost routine part of their school lives. In particular, I show how their higher than average attainments are misrepresented in public policy discourse to create a 'model minority' stereotype and to deride claims that racism is a fundamental aspect of the education system (Gillborn 2008: chapter 7). Ironically, Dave Hill's positioning of Indian students' achievements as fatally weakening CRT leads him into very similar territory to critics at the other end of the political spectrum:

If there was this racism in schools – operating to the extent that has been suggested – one would expect that Asian children too would suffer from it ... The fact of the matter is that Asian children not only *behave* better than white children and black children ... they also *achieve* better than white children and black children. So why are they immune if there's this underlying racist tendency so strongly in our schools? (Local politician quoted in Gillborn 2008: 146 original emphasis)

The performance of Indian, Chinese and other Asian pupils continues to outstrip those of white children. So why all the fuss? (*The Times* newspaper, quoted in Gillborn 2008: 146)

CRT presentations repeatedly omit statistics concerning the achievements of Indian heritage children This omission enables CRT theorists to represent – indeed, misrepresent- Whites as achieving considerably more highly than minority ethnic groups (Hill 2009a: 8)

The space available in a book-length treatment is, of course, a luxury; shorter papers have to adopt a more specific focus. Consequently I do not include Figure 1, nor a discussion of the model minority stereotype, in every publication and presentation that I write. This is because, in a restricted space, those arguments are not always central to the main thrust of the paper/presentation. For example, in a publication for the Runnymede Trust (Gillborn 2009b) and a keynote address to the National Arts Learning Network (Gillborn 2009c) – both of which Dave Hill cites – my main focus was how the British media, commentators and some academics have created an image of the White working class as new race victims, simultaneously erasing from sight the wider inequities of achievement for most ethnic minority groups *and* inferring that White achievement has been sacrificed to the needs of Black students:

Half school ‘failures’ are white working-class boys, says report
Guardian, 22 June 2007

White working-class boys are the worst performers in school
Independent, 22 June 2007

School low achievers are white and British
The Times, 22 June 2007

White boys ‘are being left behind’ by education system
Daily Mail, 22 June 2007

White boys ‘let down by education system’
Daily Telegraph, 22 June 2007

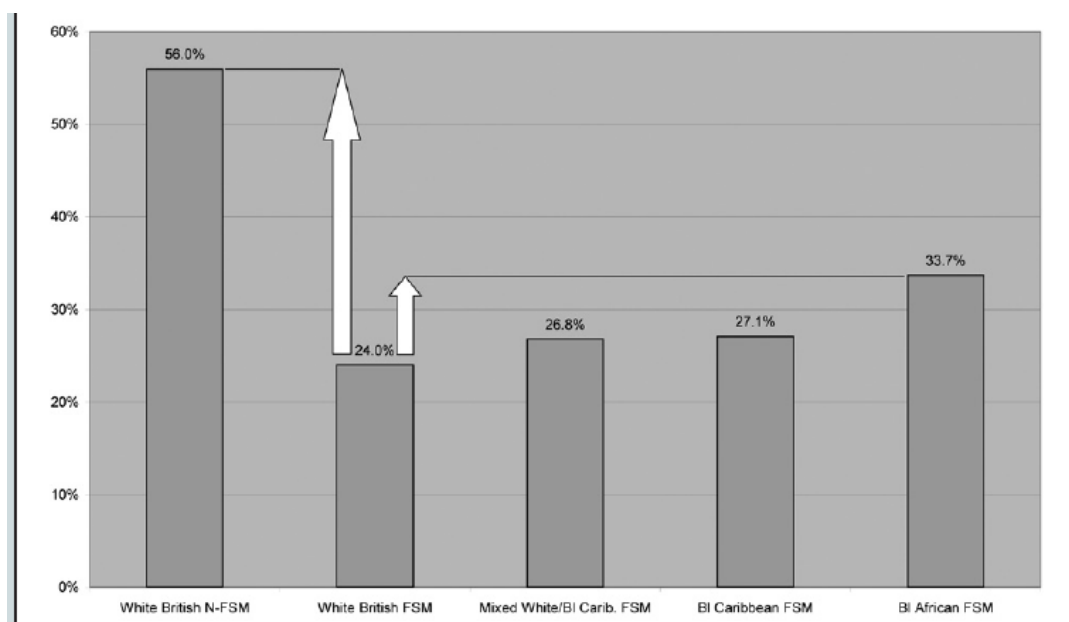
Deprived white boys ‘low achievers’
Daily Express, 22 June 2007

I point out that the statistics that are used by the press focus *only* on FSM students (around 13% of the GCSE cohort). I ask the question, what about the other 87 per cent? I show that far from being an under-achieving group, in the un-reported non-FSM data Whites of both

sexes were more likely to achieve the GCSE benchmark than their peers in several minoritized groups: Hill reproduces the relevant chart in his paper (Hill 2009a: figure 8 p. 11). My chart's purpose, therefore, was to challenge the invisibility of race inequity among the 87% of the school population who do not receive free school meals. The fact of Indian and Chinese success does not invalidate this analysis. By taking the chart out of context, and reading it alongside a superficial notion of White supremacy (which does not accord with any genuine CRT treatment) Hill is able to create the false impression of wrong-doing.

In fact, readers who consult the shorter works will discover that far from an 'extraordinarily subdued' treatment of class (Hill 2009a: 2 and 24), the pieces draw attention to the intersectional quality of race and class inequities. Both pieces, for example, include a chart showing that inequalities of attainment associated with economic disadvantage for White boys are more than *three times bigger* than those comparing White and Black boys in receipt of FSM which received so much press attention (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Five or more higher grade (A*-C) GCSEs (any subject): boys by ethnic origin and free school meal status, England 2006.



Source: Gillborn 2009b (figure 1, p. 18) and Gillborn 2009c (slide 22).

Such inequalities do not invalidate CRT as Hill claims, rather they highlight the urgent need for a critical and perceptive treatment of how race/class inequities operate intersectionally and are differently presented in the media and education policy. Specifically, despite the much larger inequities between White boys who do- and do not receive free school meals (32 percentage points), it was the much smaller race inequities between White and Black African FSM boys (9.7 percentage points) that were the focus of press warnings that such figures would fuel support for racist parties like the BNP (British National Party) – effectively using the data to discipline calls for race equality:

White boys falling behind

White, working-class boys have the worst GCSE results

... Just 24 per cent of disadvantaged white boys now leave school with five or more good GCSEs. This compares with 33.7 per cent for black African boys from similar low-income households. There were fears last night that the figures could hand votes to the far-Right British National Party because additional funding is available to help children from ethnic minorities. (*Daily Mail*, 13 January 2007 quoted in Gillborn 2009b: 17)

I would not have included the data in figure 3 if, as Hill argues, I was intent on preserving a crude common-sense notion of White supremacy and ignoring economic factors. The truth is that understanding contemporary educational inequities requires that both race *and* class be taken seriously.

Against Zero/Sum Analyses

Figure 3 highlights the need for critical theorists to articulate a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of the fluid, complex and sometimes unpredictable interactions between different dimensions of oppression (such as class, race, gender, sexuality and disability). This work is being undertaken by critical race theorists and others (for example using feminist and postcolonial theory), often under the banner of intersectionality (see Gillborn & Youdell 2009; Phoenix 2009). This project is by no means complete but it is in stark contrast to the caricature of CRT painted by Hill:

In this paper I critique what I analyse as the misuse of statistics in arguments put forward by some Critical Race Theorists in Britain showing that ‘Race’ ‘trumps’ Class in terms of underachievement...’ (Hill 2009a: 2)

So, according to Gillborn's statistics, as supplied to and represented in the TES (Marley, 2008) 'race' trumps class after all! (ibid. p. 16)

Although the word 'trumps' is placed in quotation marks in the first of these extracts there is no supporting reference. I have searched every article and book I've written since the mid 1990s and I have never argued that race unilaterally 'trumps' class in any of my published work. Once again, therefore, I (and indeed CRT) stand accused of an imagined crime while Hill's version of Marxism asserts a zero/sum reading of his own, placing class in the position of pre-eminent oppression.[2] I include the caveat that this is Hill's *version* of Marxism because Marxism is a broad and diverse perspective: there are writers who do not view CRT and Marxism as mutually incompatible (see Leonardo 2009; Mills 2009; Preston 2009; Warmington 2009). Unfortunately, such a synthesis seems to be out of the question for both Dave Hill and Mike Cole, both of whom have launched attacks on CRT in the name of a version of Marxism that is seen as fundamentally incompatible (and superior):

My own view is that CRT and Marxism are basically incompatible. (Cole 2009a: 119)

These data are important. They feed into and inform theoretical analyses concerning the impact of 'race' and of class on educational achievement, and hence into arguments and theoretical analyses concerning the severity of the impact of race and class discrimination, oppression in society. Hence to *the legitimacy of on the one hand Marxist, and on the other hand Critical Race Theory analyses of society*. (Hill 2009a: 24 emphasis added)

In this way, orthodox Marxist critiques of CRT in the UK risk constructing a zero/sum view of oppression where class and race are not viewed as complex inter-related dimensions of oppression, but simply as competing meta-narratives in a crude either/or perspective.

Social Class and Educational Achievement

With respect to social class and educational attainment, what is the validity of selecting two contiguous social class/ strata in order to show social class differences in educational attainment? (Hill 2009a: 2 and 8)

Departing from 2000 report's practice of showing class difference in educational attainment by comparing 'social class 1' (upper professional) with

‘social class 5’ (unskilled working class), Critical Race Theorists, for example in statistics supplied to the *Times Educational Supplement* [TES](Marley, 2008) now seek to show class difference in educational attainment by comparing ‘social class 3’) with ‘social class 4’). Of course, these differences are considerably narrower than between ‘social class 1’ and ‘social class 5’. *Working class achievement is misrepresented by a narrow focus on contiguous strata.* (ibid. p. 4 emphasis added)

In his critique Dave Hill suggests that comparing social classes I and V is somehow a true (valid) representation of social class inequities while comparing III and IV is a ‘misrepresentation’. But Hill is missing the point that these are *all* social class comparisons. One of my aims in my interview with the TES reporter was to challenge the assumptions that class is equally important for all people and that it dwarfs all other aspects of inequity. The gap between III and IV *is* a social class inequity and it relates to a larger proportion of the population (54%) than the I/V comparison (which covers 35% of the population).[3] Hill seems to be asserting that the more extreme comparison is the only true/valid representation but this is clearly not the case: there is no single correct way of showing the association between class and attainment for all students. This is one of the points I was trying to make through the TES article, that class and race should not be seen as stable, unitary factors that always operate in the same way. Of course, the TES report (Marley 2008) was not written by me: it is based on a telephone interview I gave to the reporter and so the selection of quotes and the editorial slant is *theirs*. My drive in giving the interview, and supplying the data, was to challenge the simplistic assertion that class always dwarfs other inequalities and so it should be the dominant, possibly exclusive, focus of equity drives.

The TES report captures *some* of this when it states:

Professor Gillborn places pupils on a five-point social scale. Comparing the results of pupils from categories one and five, social class is responsible for an amazing 44 per cent difference between the proportions of children achieving five good GCSEs. But pupils from the extreme ends of the spectrum account for only a third of children. Comparing the results of children in the second and third social class categories, which represent more than half of pupils, the difference in results is a far smaller 12 per cent.

‘The same data gives very different readings,’ said Professor Gillborn. ‘It can show that, in fact, class has less impact than race.’

‘At the moment there’s a panic about white working-class children. But a lot of that panic is built on a misreading of the statistics.’

‘Class is very important. But it’s being treated like some kind of competition between working-class kids and ethnic minorities. The suggestion is that you can’t help one group without hurting another, but that is patently ridiculous.’ (Marley 2008: 1).

I have never denied the size of the gap between social class I and V: after all I created the chart that Dave Hill prefers and reproduces *twice* (as figures 1 and 13 in his paper: published originally in Gillborn & Mirza 2000: 22). I have not changed my mind about the data, rather I present the additional analysis in order to work against a misreading of the I/V comparison. This concern is also evident in the original report that I wrote with Heidi Safia Mirza: in our discussion of the chart that Hill reproduces we warn against the danger of creating simplistic hierarchies of oppression:

Our intention here is to contextualize these relative disadvantages: it is important not to fall into the trap of simply arguing *between* various inequalities. *All* pupils have a gender, class and ethnic identity – the factors do not operate in isolation. (Gillborn & Mirza 2000: 23, original emphases)

Once again, therefore, Dave Hill misunderstands the point of my analysis: my aim was not to erase the earlier work but to set it in context where class inequalities are more complex than might be assumed from the bold I/V comparison. In fact, readers comparing this reply with Hill’s original will note that we both quote the first paragraph from the TES story (above) but Hill ends the quotation there: he does not include the rest of the passage including my statement that ‘The same data gives very different readings ... Class is very important. But it’s being treated like some kind of competition between working-class kids and ethnic minorities.’ Having ignored this point, he is free to continue treating class and race as a competition for the status of dominant oppression.

Objective and Subjective Data

As part of my critique of the current manufactured panic around White racial failure, I draw attention to the media’s use of the phrase ‘working class’ and, in particular, the mismatch

between that phrase's powerful resonance for a majority of people and the much more limited data upon which the stories are actually based:

In the GCSE data quoted above 13.2% of all pupils were in receipt of free school meals. But in a recent survey by the National Centre for Social Research 57% of UK adults described themselves as 'working class'. Consequently the discursive slippage [in the press coverage] from 'free school meals' to 'working class' has the effect of inflating the significance of the finding: data on a relatively small group of students (13% of the cohort) are reported in a way that makes it appear descriptive of more than half the population (57%). (Gillborn 2009b: 21)

Dave Hill comments on the comparison thus:

It is notable that in this one sole instance Gillborn departs from using hard statistical data, in favour of using subjective self-identification data. This is an unusual and questionable procedure which he does not draw attention to or justify. (Hill 2009a: 19)

I am not sure whether to be insulted or amused by this. My entire rationale for the comparison (made explicit in the quotation above) is to highlight the disjuncture between the 'hard statistical data' and the 'subjective self-identification'. The suggestion that I do not 'draw attention' to it is absurd and the assertion that this is 'an unusual and questionable procedure' is entirely false but, yet again, succeeds in suggesting some sort of malign and/or dishonest intent on my part.

Conclusion

CRT's usefulness will be limited not by the weakness of its constructs but by the degree that many whites will not accept its assumptions; I anticipate critique from both left and right. (Taylor 1998: 124)

Critical Race Theory represents a fundamental challenge to traditional perspectives on the nature of inequality in society: from its very inception CRT has been the target of criticism from numerous quarters. At times the criticism has been productive and useful; at other times, the criticism has been narrow, ill-informed and self-serving. Although Hill's paper includes a formal acknowledgement of the existence of racism, his treatment of critical race research is

dismissive and patronizing. In addition to the many factual errors that I have documented (above) his paper also betrays a readiness to caricature and ridicule the work of people of color:

David Gillborn's insistence, like the Racism Awareness Training theorists of the 1970s, and like the various incarnations of black separatists and nationalists in various countries, seeks to blame all whites, and serves to divide the working class, black from white. (Hill 2009a: 26)

Similarly, a few pages later he refers to 'a succession of black separatist, "blame all whites" and (now) Critical Race Theorists'... (ibid. 28). It is surprising that a man dedicated to equity campaigns can be so casually dismissive and insulting. There are no supporting references and so I cannot know who he has in mind when he refers to 'the various incarnations of black separatists and nationalists in various countries' but to simply dismiss race conscious politics and research as seeking to 'blame all whites' hardly qualifies as a serious attempt to debate the merits of CRT.

Notes

1. I have inserted 'no' (in parenthesis) before 'biological basis to "race"' because I assume that this is the intention of the original and the word was omitted in error by either Mr Banfield or Professor Hill. If this is not the case then the sentence is entirely contradictory.
2. Similarly Anthony Green has argued that studies of White privilege and critical race theory 'underplay and distract from social relations of economic production' (Green 2010: 117).
3. The calculations draw on data from the Youth Cohort Study: DfES (2005) table A and B.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to the following friends and colleagues for their comments on an earlier draft of this reply: Michael W. Apple, Stephen J. Ball, Gregg Beratan, Alice Bradbury, Paul Crofts, Richard Delgado, Kevin Hylton, Zeus Leonardo, Charles W. Mills, Heidi Safia Mirza, Andy Pilkington, John Preston, Nicola Rollock, Jean Stefancic, Carol Vincent, Paul Warmington, Deborah Youdell and Terezia Zoric.

References

- Ansley, F.L. (1997) White Supremacy (And What We Should Do about It), in R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (eds)(1997) *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 592-595.
- Bell, D. (1980) Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma, *Harvard Law Review*, 93: 518-533.
- Bell, D. (1992) *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: the permanence of racism*, New York: Basic Books.
- Cole, M. (2009a) The Color-Line and the Class Struggle: a Marxist response to critical race theory in education as it arrives in the United Kingdom, *Power and Education*, 1(1): 111-124.
- Cole, M. (2009b) On 'white supremacy' and caricaturing, misrepresenting and dismissing Marx and Marxism: a response to David Gillborn's 'Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory in Education', *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 7(1): 29-49.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (2002) The first decade: Critical reflections, or 'a foot in the closing door' *UCLA Law Review*, 49, 1343-1372.
- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G. & Thomas, K. (Eds) (1995) *Critical Race Theory: the key writings that formed the movement*. New York: New Press.
- Delgado, R. (1989) Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative, *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 87, pp. 2411-2441.
- Delgado, R. (2007) *The Law Unbound! A Richard Delgado Reader*. A.K. Wing & J. Stefancic (eds). Boulder, Co: Paradigm Publishers.
- Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (Eds)(1998) *The Latino/a Condition: a critical reader*. New York: New York University Press.

Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (Eds)(2000) *Critical Race Theory: the cutting edge*. 2nd edn. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2001) *Critical Race Theory: an introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (Eds)(2007) *The Derrick Bell Reader*. New York: New York University Press.

Department for Education & Skills (DfES)(2005) *Youth Cohort Study: The Activities and Experiences of 16 Year Olds: England and Wales 2004.: SFR 04/2005 REVISED*. London: DfES.

Department for Education & Skills (DfES)(2006) *National Curriculum Assessment, GCSE and Equivalent Attainment and Post-16 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England 2005/06. SFR 46/2006*. London, DfES. Full tables available online at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000693/Addition1V1.xls> (last accessed 10 December 2009).

Fanon, F. (1967) *Black Skin White Masks*. C. Markmann (trans.). New York: Grove Press.

Gillborn, D. (2006) Critical Race Theory and Education: racism and anti-racism in educational theory and praxis, *Discourse*, 27(1), 11-32.

Gillborn, D. (2008) *Racism and Education: coincidence or conspiracy?* London: Routledge.

Gillborn, D. (2009a) Who's afraid of critical race theory in education? A reply to Mike Cole's 'The Color-Line and the Class Struggle', *Power and Education*, 1(1): 125-131.

Gillborn, D. (2009b) Education. The Numbers Game and the Construction of White Racial Victimhood, in Kjartan P. Sveinsson (Ed.)(2009) *Who Cares About the White Working Class?* London: Runnymede Trust, pp. 15-22.

Gillborn, D. (2009c) Whatever happened to institutional racism? How the 'White working class' were made into the new race victims, keynote address to National Arts Learning Network (NALN) annual conference, February, London. Transcript and slides available at <http://www.naln.ac.uk/en/conference/keynote-presentations/professor-david-gillborn.cfm> (last accessed 18 December 2009).

Gillborn, D. (2010) The White working class, racism and respectability: victims, degenerates and interest-convergence, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 58(1): 3-25.

Gillborn, D. & Mirza, H.S. (2000) *Educational Inequality: Mapping Race, Class and Gender - A Synthesis of Research Evidence*. Report #HMI 232. London: Office for Standards in Education.

Gillborn, D. & Youdell, D. (2009) Critical perspectives on race and schooling, in James A. Banks (Ed.)(2009) *The Routledge International Companion to Multicultural Education*. New York: Routledge, pp. 173-185.

Green, Anthony (2010) Re-contextualising the re-contextualisers or pedagogy of the impressed?, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31(1): 111 — 119.

Hill, D. (2009a) Race and Class in Britain: a critique of the statistical basis for Critical Race Theory in Britain: and some political implications, *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 7(2): 1-40. <http://www.jceps.com/?pageID=article&articleID=159>

Hill, D. (2009b) *Statistical Skullduggery in the Case for Critical Race Theory: how statistical tables comparing 'race' and class underachievement have been fiddled to prove CRT's point in England*. Paper presented at the conference *Critical Race Theory in the UK: what is to be learnt? What is to be done?* Institute of Education, University of London, 25-26 June.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998) Just What is Critical Race Theory and What's it Doing in a Nice Field Like Education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1): 7-24.

Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W.F. (1995) Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education, *Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.

Leonardo, Z. (2004) The unhappy marriage between Marxism and race critique: political economy and the production of racialized knowledge, *Policy Futures in Education*, 2(3-4), 483-493.

Leonardo, Z. (2009) *Race, Whiteness, and Education*. New York: Routledge.

Lynn, M. & Parker, L. (2006) Critical Race Studies in Education: examining a decade of research on U.S. schools, *The Urban Review*, 38(4), 257-290.

Marley, D. (2008) Mind the performance gaps, Gender/Race/Class special pull-out, *Times Educational Supplement*, 30 May.

Mills, C.W. (1997) *The Racial Contract*. London: Cornell University Press.

Mills, C.W. (2003) *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

Mills, C.W. (2009) Critical Race Theory: a reply to Mike Cole, *Ethnicities*, 9(2): 270-281.

Phoenix, A. (2009) De-colonising practices: negotiating narratives from racialised and gendered experiences of education, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12(1): 101-114.

Preston, J. (2009) The rediscovery of the white working class in education: from 'concrete' to 'abstract' racial domination. Paper presented at CeCeps seminar series 'Social Class and Inequalities in the policy frame', 3rd November 2009.

Solórzano, D.G. & Yosso, T.J. (2002) Critical Race Methodology: counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1): 23-44.

Tate, W.F. (1997) Critical Race Theory and Education: history, theory, and implications, in M.W. Apple (Ed.) *Review of Research in Education*, vol. 22, 195-247. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Taylor, E. (1998) A Primer on Critical Race Theory: who are the critical race theorists and what are they saying? *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 19: 122-124.

Taylor, E., Gillborn, D. & Ladson-Billings, G. (Eds)(2009) *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in Education*. New York: Routledge.

Warmington, P. (2009) Some of my best friends are Marxists: CRT, labour, culture and the 'figured worlds' of race, *C-SAP Critical Race Theory Conference*, Institute of Education, London.

Wing, A.K. (Ed.)(1997) *Critical Race Feminism: a reader*. New York: New York University Press.

Yosso, T.J. (2005) Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1): 69-91.

Author's details

David Gillborn is Professor of Critical Race Studies in Education at the Institute of Education, University of London.

Author's correspondence

d.gillborn@ioe.ac.uk