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Richard Delgado and Ice Cube: Brothers in Arms

andré douglas pond cummings†

I. Introduction

Critical Race Theory as a movement is best understood through the lens of founding voice Richard Delgado. Delgado’s prolific and fearless writings have inspired thousands and launched theories that have literally changed the course of race law in the United States. In fact, two explosive movements were born in the United States in the 1970s. While the founding of both movements was humble and lightly noticed, both grew to become global phenomena that have profoundly changed the world. Founded by prescient agitators, these two movements were borne of disaffection, disappointment, and near desperation—a desperate need to give voice to oppressed and dispossessed peoples. America in the 1970s bore witness to the founding of two furious movements: Critical Race Theory and hip-hop.

Critical Race Theory (or CRT) was founded as a response to what had been deemed a sputtering civil rights agenda in the U.S.1 Driven primarily by law professors of color, it targeted the law by exposing the racial inequities supported by U.S. law and policy.2

†. Vice Dean and Professor of Law, Indiana Tech Law School; J.D., Howard University School of Law. Portions of this tribute Essay were first published in andré douglas pond cummings, A Furious Kinship: Critical Race Theory and the Hip Hop Nation, 48 U. LOUISVILLE L. REV. 499 (2010) and in andré douglas pond cummings, Derrick Bell: Godfather Provocateur, 28 HARV. J. ON RACIAL & ETHNIC JUST. 51 (2012). I am grateful to Prosper Batinge, Indiana Tech Law School Class of 2016, for his excellent research assistance. Further gratitude is expressed to the excellent leadership of Minnesota’s Law and Inequality: A Journal of Theory and Practice for hosting this tribute and issue honoring the seminal work of Richard Delgado. I respectfully offer this tribute to Professor Richard Delgado as my humble acknowledgment of the incredible influence he has had in the legal academy, on U.S. legal discourse, and in my own personal life and intellectual pursuits. Of course, as usual, the politics and errata of this Essay belong exclusively to me.

1. CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE CUTTING EDGE xvi (Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic eds., 2d ed. 2000) [hereinafter THE CUTTING EDGE] (stating that “Critical Race Theory sprang up in the mid-1970s with the early work of Derrick Bell (an African American) and Alan Freeman (a White), both of whom were deeply distressed over the slow pace of racial reform in the United States”).

Hip-hop, on the other hand, was founded by emerging artists, musicians, and agitators in the South Bronx neighborhoods of New York City, primarily driven by young African American disaffected youth, as a response to a faltering music industry and abject poverty. While these two movements, Critical Race Theory and hip-hop, seem significantly separated by presentation, content, and point of origin, they share startling similarities. Among the many similarities between Critical Race Theory and hip-hop, the closest link is the use of narrative in response to racism and injustice in a post-civil rights era. Further, Critical Race Theory and hip-hop share a fundamental desire to give voice to a discontent brewed by silence, and a dedication to the continuing struggle for race equality in the United States. Both Critical Race Theory and hip-hop strive toward their mutual goals of radical realignment and societal recognition and change of race and law in America.

Both Critical Race Theory and hip-hop found a post-civil rights era voice and used this voice to express fiery and furious critiques of a system that was, and still is, fundamentally unfair. Both movements found audiences that were yearning for a vehicle to speak truth to power; indeed, they had been waiting for a representative voice to expose a reality known by so many of the oppressed and voiceless. Hip-hop was a source of validation and acknowledgment for a generation that had been shut out and shut...
down.® CRT served a similar function for a professional movement that had become frustrated with the failure of America to live up to its promise of equality and social justice.10 Together, these two movements converged in extraordinary ways.

One of the most important voices in the nascent days of the CRT movement was founding voice Richard Delgado, who along with Derrick Bell, introduced the world to CRT. Delgado published the explosive articles *The Imperial Scholar*11 and *A Plea for Narrative.*12 Delgado’s early CRT publications represented an effort to educate and enlighten the civil-rights generation, emerging scholars of color, and the rest of the legal world to the inequities and discrimination inherent in a legal system that systematically disadvantages minority citizens in the U.S.13 Delgado’s voice was so important during the founding of CRT that he is revered today as a true pioneer in race jurisprudence in the United States.

II. Sharing a Parallel Universe14

A. Launch

When many of the founding members of Critical Race Theory met in 1989 at a workshop at the St. Benedict Center in Madison, Wisconsin,15 launching a global academic movement was likely not at the forefront of their minds. Meeting together as law professors of color was more about support and survival within the White male-dominated legal academy than about spawning a movement that would change the debate of race in America.16 Similarly,
when DJ Kool Herc and Africa Bambaataa began spinning records on turntables in the parks of the South Bronx and rhyming over the instrumental hooks, launching a global cultural and musical movement was likely not their objective.\textsuperscript{17} The roots of both launches were humble, unassuming, and sparsely witnessed.\textsuperscript{18} Truly, the beginning of CRT and the origination of hip-hop both sprang from the creative and aggressive minds of a few forward-thinking progressives that simply \textit{had} to find a forum by which to express very different ways of communicating, thinking, writing, and philosophizing.\textsuperscript{19}

From the movement's inception, Critical Race theorists championed storytelling and narrative as valuable empirical proof of reality and the human experience, while rejecting traditional forms of legal studies, pedagogy, and various forms of civil rights leadership.\textsuperscript{20} Similarly, hip-hop, at its root, is narrative in form; the best, most recognizable hip-hop artists use storytelling as their most fundamental communicative method.\textsuperscript{21} Further, early hip-hop culture and rap music rejected the traditional legal, judicial, and educational systems, decrying—often in journalistic fashion—the status-quo system established by the White majority.\textsuperscript{22} In the same vein, Critical Race theorists rejected the straight-White-male perspective and privilege then (and still) pervasive throughout the legal academy, proposing instead a much different approach to teaching, writing, legal learning, and perspective-
sharing within the law-school classroom. Hip-hop artists have advocated for more than thirty-five years that which is perhaps most startling for traditional society: a thorough disrespect for, and disregard of, the rule of law, particularly in connection with criminal law and punishment. As studies have shown:

Youth utilize hip hop music in multiple and overlapping ways, engaging hip hop music as both a pedagogy that centers the perspectives of color and a framework to examine daily life. Specifically, youth use hip hop discourse to make sense of the ways race operates in their daily lives; to more broadly understand their position in the U.S. racial/ethnic hierarchy; and to critique traditional schooling for failing to critically incorporate their racialized ethnic/cultural identities within official school dialogues and curricula in empowering ways.

The striking similarities between CRT and hip-hop begin with the intellectual underpinnings of both movements. Both CRT and hip-hop serve the dual purpose of providing a race-based interdisciplinary theoretical framework for analyzing laws, policies, and administrative procedures that have a deleterious impact on racial minorities.

Hip-hop reinforces the basic insights of Critical Race Theory, including the notion that racism is a normal and relentless fact of daily life. In addition, personal experience and narrative storytelling are used extensively and creatively to challenge the existing social construction of race. Both CRT and hip-hop recognize that White elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for Blacks only when such advances promote White self-interest. In response to the inevitable result of cultural marginalization, African Americans have utilized hip-hop lyrics to disempower the White cultural elite. Hip-hop serves as White America’s introduction to the rest of minority society, exposing

24. See cummings, supra note 22, at 515–16.
25. See Pulido, supra note 5.
26. Id.
27. See Tate IV, supra note 2; see also THE CUTTING EDGE, supra note 1, at xv–xix; Parker, supra note 2, at 2–3.
28. See Delgado, supra note 4.
30. See Pulido, supra note 5.
traditional America to life in the inner-city. Both KRS-One and Chuck D began using their voices in hip-hop as a revolutionary mechanism to politicize youth; a tool for consciousness, education, and awareness of the common stereotypes of the day. Due to hip-hop's bold and unapologetic representation of the culture of inner-city youth to mainstream America, the public eventually had no choice but to listen and accept a different reality.

Critical Race theorists believe that a principal obstacle to genuine racial reform in the U.S. is the majoritarian mindset: an experientially limited bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings that persons in the majority bring to discussions of race. To analyze and challenge these power-laden beliefs, many CRT pioneers employed counterstories, parables, chronicles, and anecdotes aimed at revealing the contingency, cruelty, and self-serving nature of majoritarian rule. Similarly, hip-hop revolves around storytelling. In educating the hip-hop generation, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five recorded *The Message*; Public Enemy famously recorded *Fight the Power, Don't Believe the Hype, Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos*, and *911 Is a Joke*.

31. Id.
32. See Jon Christopher Wolfe, *Sex, Violence, and Profanity: Rap Music and the First Amendment*, 44 MERCER L. REV. 667, 672–73 (1993) (discussing KRS-One and Public Enemy, the rap group that Chuck D belonged to, as political actors advocating “action against the present power structure”).
33. See Glenn Collins, *Rap Music, Brash and Swaggering, Enters Mainstream*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 29, 1988, at C15, available at http://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/29/arts/rap-music-brash-and-swaggering-enters-mainstream.html (“Hip-hop, as the culture of rap is called, originated among young blacks in the Bronx in the 1970’s. Instead of fading like many previous fads, rap’s energy has become increasingly irresistible to an international audience of teen-agers and pre-teen-agers. As in other subcultural trends that have matured into mass phenomena, rap language and style are entering older, more racially diverse, middle-class and suburban communities. . . . Hip-hop words from what was once an underclass subculture are now common parlance among America’s youth . . . .’ The mainstream always hoped it would be a fad that would die,’ Mr. Bambaataa said. But instead, he maintained, the distinctive hip-hop vocabulary, clothes and culture has been important in empowering and giving status to an impoverished and isolated generation of urban young people that society found threatening.”)
34. See *The Cutting Edge*, supra note 1, at xvii.
35. See id.
released *Fuck tha Police* and *100 Miles and Runnin’*;\(^{37}\) Tupac Shakur released *Brenda’s Got a Baby, Keep Ya Head Up, and Changes*;\(^{38}\) Ice Cube released the explosive *AmeriKKKa’s Most Wanted* featuring *Endangered Species (Tales from the Darkside)* and later *Dead Homiez*;\(^{39}\) KRS-One released an entire album he styled *Edutainment* featuring *Love’s Gonna Getcha*.\(^{40}\) Each release represented an urban tale, a story known intimately by the authors/artists; likewise, each was an effort on the part of the artist to educate and enlighten the hip-hop generation.\(^{41}\) Particularly, these stories illuminated fans and listeners to the inequities and discrimination inherent in a criminal justice system that to this day systematically target and disproportionately imprison minority and urban youth.\(^{42}\)

Like the seminal hip-hop records mentioned above, CRT founders dropped narrative and intellectual bombs in their early countercultural legal writing. In educating the legal academy, and the world in general, to the deeply entrenched racism underlying American institutions, Derrick Bell wrote the profound *The Space Traders, Serving Two Masters, Minority Admissions and the Usual Price of Racial Remedies, and The Interest Convergence Theory*;\(^{43}\) Richard Delgado published the explosive *The Imperial Scholar* and *A Plea for Narrative*;\(^{44}\) Kimberlé Crenshaw authored the inspired *Race, Reform, and Retrenchment*;\(^{45}\) Charles Lawrence published the groundbreaking *The Id, the Ego, and Equal*
Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism;\textsuperscript{46} Mari Matsuda wrote Looking to the Bottom;\textsuperscript{47} and Neil Gotanda published A Critique of "Our Constitution Is Color-Blind."\textsuperscript{48} Each publication represented an effort on the part of the CRT pioneers to educate and enlighten the civil-rights generation, emerging scholars of color, and the rest of the legal world to the inequities and discrimination inherent in a legal system that systematically disadvantages minority citizens in the U.S.

The fiery critiques of U.S. law and social justice offered by both CRT founders and hip-hop's socially conscious voices were met with an intense backlash that was severe.

\textbf{B. Backlash}

At inception, both CRT and hip-hop were battered by a backlash that was intent on destroying each movement. Taking different paths, the vitriolic backlashes represented not just a fundamental disrespect for African American and minority expression, but also represented a deep-seated irrational fear held by the majority status quo and an unadulterated loathing of unfamiliar self-expression. The loathing, disrespect, and backlash against both movements proved eerily similar.

In the 1980s, as hip-hop began to expand its reach into suburban America and its youth, and as hip-hop artists and groups began to wield political power and deliver countercultural messages that resonated with those youth, an aggressive and hostile backlash emerged.\textsuperscript{49} The fearful response from law enforcement, activist groups, and government agencies came soon after seminal releases by Public Enemy, N.W.A., Boogie Down Productions and KRS-One, and Ice-T.\textsuperscript{50} Hip-hop openly and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Charles Lawrence, The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism, 39 STAN. L. REV. 317 (1987).
  \item \textsuperscript{47} Mari Matsuda, Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations, 22 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 323 (1987).
  \item \textsuperscript{49} See supra note 22 and accompanying text.
  \item \textsuperscript{50} See id.; see also Encyclopedia Britannica's Guide to Black History: hip-hop, ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA, http://kids.britannica.com/blackhistory/article-9117537 (last visited Apr. 25, 2015) [hereinafter Guide to Black History] ("The most significant response to New York hip-hop, though, came from Los Angeles, beginning in 1989 with N.W.A.'s dynamic album Straight Outta Compton. N.W.A. (Niggaz With Attitude) and former members of that group—Ice Cube, Eazy-E, and producer Dr. Dre—led the way as West Coast rap grew in prominence in the early 1990s. Their graphic, frequently violent tales of real life in the inner city, as well as those of Los Angeles rappers such as Ice-T (remembered for his 1992 single \textit{Cop Killer}) and Snoop Doggy Dogg and of East Coast counterparts such as Schoolly D,
brazenly defied traditional laws and challenged the status quo across the board.\textsuperscript{51}

Despite intense criticism and myriad attempts at its eradication,\textsuperscript{52} hip-hop did not just survive, but flourished and gave rise to the genre known as gangsta rap.\textsuperscript{53}
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exacted a dominant influence over a generation. While the initial backlash against hip-hop proved ineffective, present-day criticism continues, some for good reason. This criticism must be recognized and reconciled with hip-hop’s message of empowerment and self-realization.

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54. See Chang, supra note 3.

55. See Butler, supra note 22, at 144 (“One serious deficiency in hip-hop is its endemic sexism and homophobia. Can any credible theory of justice be based on a culture that routinely denigrates more than half the population? The answer must be ‘no.’ For hip-hop to command the moral authority that, at its best, it deserves, it must address subordination within the hip-hop nation. The problem besmirches hip-hop’s extraordinary aesthetic achievement and detracts from its important evaluation of criminal justice. Hip-hop music and videos, especially, contain the kind of depictions of gender and sexuality that we might expect of adolescent boys.”).

56. The difficult misogyny, homophobia, and violence prevalent in some hip-hop deter many from hearing and feeling the transformative messages contained in thousands of hip-hop anthems and lyrics. See generally Edward G. Armstrong, Gangsta Misogyny: A Content Analysis of the Portrayals of Violence Against Women in Rap Music, 1987-1993, 8 J. CRIM. JUST. & POPULAR CULTURE 96, 96–126 (2001). The hip-hop nation must confront, debate, and challenge those messages that serve to injure minority communities. That debate is beyond the scope of this particular Essay, although not beyond the scope of the many presentations and panels delivered in connection with this Essay. As discussed meaningfully and often at every presentation connecting this theme, the corporatization of hip-hop is often considered one of the primary drivers behind the blatant 1990s shift in hip-hop away from revolutionary groups and messaging toward the “thug life” and female objectification messaging delivered by most major record label artists. See André Douglas Pond Cummings, Akilah Felami, D. Aaron Lacy, and Kamille Wolff, Panel Presentation at LatCrit Conference, American University Washington College of Law: The Hip Hop Movement at the Intersection of Race, Class and Culture: Hip Hop Music’s Effect on Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness (Oct. 2, 2009) (on file with author) (panel discussion exploring the misogyny and promotion of violence in hip-hop, the reasons behind the messaging and potential strategies to combat the corporate message). Some leading scholars suggest that major record label corporate executives made a conscious decision in the mid-1990s to purposely “select” the thug image as the face of hip-hop in order to promote sales to White urban youth while attempting to squelch the revolutionary messages delivered by many prominent artists during that period. See André Douglas Pond Cummings, Akilah Felami, D. Aaron Lacy, and Kamille Wolff, Panel Presentation at the
Similarly, when CRT emerged and began to find genuine traction in the legal academy, the critical backlash from the establishment was acerbic and intense. Of course, those invested and entrenched in protecting traditional legal scholarship criticized the emerging CRT scholarship as ungrounded, overly passionate and polemic, and neither academic nor intellectual. The traditional academy sought to expose the narrative convention of CRT as non-scholarly, unempirical, unrepresentative, and untrustworthy. In addition, opponents of the movement criticized CRT as promoting a "myth" that people of color share a specific or unified voice, and therefore should not be recognized as fundamentally important on issues of race.

The crucial element of Critical Race Theory's aggressive storytelling and narrative tradition is that it invites the legal academy to "construct a new world" by "combining elements from the story and current reality." However, this invitation to construct a different reality was resisted with vigor. The opposition from the traditional academy was extremely critical and, more than likely, expected. During the firestorm of early

58. See DANIEL A. FARBER & SUZANNA SHERRY, BEYOND ALL REASON: THE RADICAL ASSAULT ON TRUTH IN AMERICAN LAW 12 (1997) (exploring "the mechanisms that allow the radicals to abandon common sense and adhere to a set of basically implausible beliefs"); see also Randall L. Kennedy, Racial Critiques of Legal Academia, 102 HARV. L. REV. 1745, 1745-46 (1989); but see Richard Delgado, On Telling Stories in School: A Reply to Farber and Sherry, 46 VAND. L. REV. 665, 666-67 (1993) (finding Farber & Sherry's perspective as discrediting the outsider and overly scrutinizing the stories of others).
59. See generally FARBER & SHERRY, supra note 58, at 12; see also Kennedy, supra note 58, at 1745-48; but see Delgado, supra note 58, at 666-67.
60. See FARBER & SHERRY, supra note 58, at 12; see also Kennedy, supra note 58, at 1787.
61. See Delgado, supra note 4, at 2415.
62. See generally Daniel A. Farber & Suzanna Sherry, Telling Stories out of School: An Essay on Legal Narratives, 45 STAN. L. REV. 807, 814-15 (1993) ("Related to the lack of evidence for the existence of a distinct voice of color, we have found little exploration of the content of such a voice."); Kennedy, supra note 58, at 1778 ("But what, as a function of race, is 'special' or 'distinct' about the scholarship of minority legal academics? Does it differ discernibly in ways attributable to race from work produced by white scholars? If so, in what ways and to what degree is the work of colored intellectuals different from or better than the work of whites?").
63. See FARBER & SHERRY, supra note 58, at 814-15; Kennedy, supra note 58, at 1778.
criticism, Richard Delgado contended that the movement was in its “infancy,” and was still defining itself. Delgado wondered aloud about the critics’ “rush to judgment” and openly questioned the motives of those making such caustic attacks so soon after the budding of the new movement.

Notwithstanding the early acerbic critiques and backlash, both hip-hop and CRT shook off the criticism and controversy and continued to offer powerful alternatives to mainstream legal scholarship and contemporary music. Critical Race Theory rejected the critique and scorned the invitation to ground its relevance in traditional “accepted” methodologies. True to its purpose and the power of its narrative, CRT scholars endeavored to produce scholarship and advocate for the oppressed and voiceless and did so. They continue to do so today—unapologetically. CRT’s slow burn continues today as evidenced by its powerful movement across disciplines and a deep legitimacy gained through its urgency and adherents. Hip-hop similarly rebuffed the backlash, and its artists created, for a time, the most powerfully relevant and critical music of its generation. Critical Race Theory and hip-hop both continued to grow in influence and reach. There are valid and important exceptions to this growth, but acknowledging the weaknesses of each movement does not undermine the critical importance of both. To the contrary, active acknowledgment and analysis of criticisms borne from experientially diverse narratives—often encompassing those of the status quo—only emphasizes the inclusionary foundational principles upon which both movements were founded.

64. See Delgado, supra note 57, at 766.
65. Id. In 1993, Richard Delgado explained that Critical Race Theory, having sprung up in 1989, only consisted of four or five books and just 200 articles. Id. He then offered: “Yet, a number of authors . . . wish to rush to establish criteria to evaluate the scholarship. Why?” Id. Professor Farber, an outspoken opponent of Critical Race Theory, opined in 1994: “As of yet, no clear agreement exists about the defining characteristics of CRT.” Daniel A. Farber, The Outmoded Debate over Affirmative Action, 82 CALIF. L. REV. 893, 903 (1994).
66. See Castillo-Garstow, supra note 3; see also Pulido, supra note 5.
67. See Delgado, supra note 57, at 766.
68. See generally Delgado, supra note 58.
69. See generally cummings et al., supra note 56; see also cummings, supra note 14.
70. See CHANG, supra note 3; see generally BUTLER, supra note 22.
71. See Rutherford, supra note 52.
72. See BUTLER, supra note 22, at 144.
C. Founders

The launching of CRT shares a parallel universe with hip-hop's inception, and the backlash against hip-hop mirrors the initial academic rejection of CRT. Still, a more intriguing parallel exists between the voices of the individual founders of CRT and hip-hop's early pioneers. In significant ways, the early themes delivered by CRT pioneers and the political critiques offered by hip-hop founders, while different in delivery and context, are powerfully similar in theme, tone, and effect. Millions of Americans, and eventually hundreds of millions of human beings worldwide, were inspired, moved, and changed by the similar messages dropped by CRT scholars and hip-hop poets. No early CRT voice was more important than that of Richard Delgado. His articles and speeches were fiercely critical, unapologetic, and resonated with academics worldwide. Similarly, no early hip-hop voice seized the attention of both fans and critics alike the way that Ice Cube and N.W.A. did when “Straight Outta Compton” shocked the nation at its release. Both furiously challenged convention and status quo America.

III. Richard Delgado and Ice Cube/N.W.A. 74

Richard Delgado shares a potent kinship with Ice Cube and the “dangerous” hip-hop group N.W.A. When Professor Delgado published The Imperial Scholar, 75 its impact was a literary shot across the bow of the traditional legal academy in its aggressive repudiation of entrenched White male civil rights legal scholarship. 76 Like a hand grenade launched into the upper reaches of an ivory tower, Delgado authored a blistering critique that condemned famed civil rights scholars for their own racism and failure to garner, appreciate, or represent the views of the very oppressed minority groups on whose behalf these scholars purported to advocate. 77 Many professors of color were writing...

73. See ICE CUBE, KILL AT WILL (Priority Records 1990); compare Farber & Sherry, supra note 62, with Delgado, supra note 58.
74. Portions of this Section originally appeared in cummings, supra note 14.
75. Delgado, supra note 11.
77. Delgado, supra note 11.
articles and books about civil rights, yet the White male
traditional academy ignored them. Delgado exposed the
hypocrisy of the top legal scholars in the United States who
pontificated on issues of civil rights and continuing racism in a
vacuum, sans impact or influence of minority voices.

As Professor Delgado charged in *The Imperial Scholar* when
referring to the entrenched White civil rights “experts”:

> A careful reading of the inner circle articles suggests that
> many of the above mentioned problems and pitfalls are not
> simply hypothetical, but do in fact occur. A number of the
> authors were unaware of basic facts about the situation in
> which minority persons live or ways in which they see the
> world. From the viewpoint of a minority member, the
> assertions and arguments made by nonminority authors were
> sometimes so naive as to seem incomprehensible and hardly
> merit serious consideration . . . .

In addition to factual ignorance or naiveté, some of the writing
suffered from a failure of empathy, an inability to share the
values, desires, and perspectives of the population whose
rights are under consideration. Sitting comfortably atop the civil rights ivory tower and opining
from a place devoid of authentic experience, leading civil rights
authors of the time were undoubtedly stunned at Professor
Delgado’s highly charged accusation of hypocrisy. Professor
Delgado’s claim was an accusation of negligence at best and
conscious racism at worst. Yet and still, Delgado levied the claims
and dropped the bomb, consequences be damned. For the young
scholars coming up, Delgado’s bold and brash indictment of the
“powers that be” was a remarkable moment, where truth was truly
spoken to power; a moment that emboldened the emerging CRT
generation.

Later, in fully embracing his role as a Critical Race Theory
founder, Professor Delgado authored *A Plea for Narrative* which
served as a response to the vitriolic backlash against CRT and
eventually became the blueprint article for young scholars to
follow in comprehending narrative scholarship and authoring

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78. Id. at 567–68.
79. Id.
80. See generally cummings, supra note 22.
81. Kennedy, supra note 76, at 1346 n.44 (“While I disagree with both the
method and the conclusion of Professor Delgado’s analysis, I applaud his
willingness to explore this sensitive and neglected subject.”).
82. See West, supra note 20.
83. Delgado, supra note 4.
Critical Race pieces of import. In *A Plea for Narrative*, Professor Delgado profoundly posits:

The stories of outgroups aim to subvert that ingroup reality. In civil rights, for example, many in the majority hold that any inequality between blacks and whites is due either to cultural lag, or inadequate enforcement of currently existing beneficial laws—both of which are easily correctable. For many minority persons, the principal instrument of their subordination is neither of these. Rather, it is the prevailing *mindset* by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is, that is, with whites on top and browns and blacks at the bottom.

Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place. These matters are rarely focused on. They are like eyeglasses we have worn a long time. They are nearly invisible; we use them to scan and interpret the world and only rarely examine them for themselves. Ideology—the received wisdom—makes current social arrangements seem fair and natural. Those in power sleep well at night—their conduct does not seem to them like oppression.

The cure is storytelling (or as I shall sometimes call it, counterstorytelling). As Derrick Bell, Bruno Bettelheim, and others show, stories can shatter complacency and challenge the status quo.

... Traditional legal writing purports to be neutral and dispassionately analytical, but too often it is not. In part, this is so because legal writers rarely focus on their own mindsets, the received wisdoms that serve as their starting points, themselves no more than stories, that lie behind their quasi-scientific string of deductions. The supposedly objective point of view often mischaracterizes, minimizes, dismisses, or derides without fully understanding opposing viewpoints. Implied that objective, correct answers can be given to legal questions also obscures the moral and political value judgments that lie at the heart of any legal inquiry.

Legal storytelling is an engine built to hurl rocks over walls of social complacency that obscure the view out from the citadel.

84. See id. at 2413–14; 2441.
85. *Id.* at 2413–14.
But the rocks all have messages tied to them that the defenders cannot help but read. The messages say, let us knock down the walls, and use the blocks to pave a road we can all walk together.\textsuperscript{86}

In \textit{A Plea for Narrative}, Professor Delgado issued a bold “call to arms” to those in the academy, urging a new conceptualization of academic scholarship; one that centered on narrative, personal storytelling, and counter-storytelling in order to “knock down”\textsuperscript{87} walls and destroy entrenched paradigms.\textsuperscript{88} He simultaneously rejected the sacred traditional legal scholarship as neutral, dispassionate, and purely analytical.\textsuperscript{89}

In both \textit{The Imperial Scholar} and \textit{A Plea for Narrative}, Professor Delgado attacked the entrenched status quo majority on two fronts.\textsuperscript{90} First, the frontal assault directly challenged the mores of White privilege in the legal academy and practice of law, asking why “authentic” legal scholarship is—and could be—only that voiced by the privileged and entrenched.\textsuperscript{91} Second, the assault on the rear flanks was the clarion call to every scholar of color and emerging outsider scholar and lawyer to a new and different conceptualization by which legal scholarship could be presented and legal practice conducted.\textsuperscript{92} Truthfully, Richard Delgado’s writings were acerbic and violent rejections of the status quo ante. And, as chronicled above, the traditional academic responses to Delgado’s new conceptualization-call were bitter, outraged, condescending, and dripping in privilege and protectionism.\textsuperscript{93}

Similarly, when Ice Cube, Eazy-E, Dr. Dre, MC Ren, and DJ Yella (as N.W.A.) released \textit{Straight Outta Compton},\textsuperscript{94} the album dropped profoundly on the consciences of inner-city youth, the nation, and eventually, the globe.\textsuperscript{95} Never before had such an intensely angry, ferocious, rebellious record been released and embraced by the consuming public.\textsuperscript{96} Cuts like \textit{Fuck tha Police}, \textit{Gangsta Gangsta}, and \textit{Straight Outta Compton} resonated with

\begin{itemize}
\item[86.] Id. at 2440–41.
\item[87.] Id. at 2441.
\item[88.] Id.
\item[89.] Delgado, \textit{supra} note 4.
\item[90.] Delgado, \textit{supra} note 11. Delgado, \textit{supra} note 4.
\item[91.] See Delgado, \textit{supra} note 11.
\item[92.] See Delgado, \textit{supra} note 4.
\item[93.] See \textit{supra} note 58 and accompanying text.
\item[94.] N.W.A., \textit{STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON} (Ruthless Records/Priority Records/EMI Records 1988).
\item[95.] cummings, \textit{supra} note 22, at 521.
\item[96.] \textit{Guide to Black History}, \textit{supra} note 50.
\end{itemize}
inner-city youth. N.W.A. not only chronicled the brutal life of the inner-city, but also exposed American law enforcement as racist, predisposed against minority youth, and intent on putting as many young African American men in prison as possible. N.W.A.'s brash style and violent extrapolation of the "gangsta" lifestyle engendered genuine fear in the hearts of mainstream America and U.S. law enforcement. To wit, Ice Cube rhymed on *Fuck tha Police*:

- Fuck tha police;
- Comin' straight from the underground;
- Young n***a got it bad 'cause I'm brown;
- And not the other color, so police think;
- They have the authority to kill a minority;

- Fuck that shit 'cause I ain't that one;
- For a punk muthafucka with a badge and a gun;
- To be beaten on and thrown in jail;
- We could go toe to toe in the middle of a cell;

- Fuckin' with me 'cause I'm a teenager;
- With a little bit of gold and a pager;
- Searchin' my car, lookin' for the product;
- Thinkin' every n***a is sellin' narcotics;

- You'd rather see me in the pen;
- Than me and Lorenzo rollin' in the Benzo; . . .

- . . . And on the other hand, without a gun, they can't get none;
- But don't let it be a black and white one;
- 'Cause they slam ya down to the street top;
- Black police showin' out for the white cop;

- Ice Cube will swarm;
- On any muthafucka in a blue uniform;
- Just 'cause I'm from the CPT, punk police are afraid of me;
- A young n***a on a warpath;
- And when I'm finished, it's gonna be a bloodbath;
- Of cops dyin' in L.A.;

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99. See *supra* note 50 and accompanying text.
Yo, Dre, I got something to say:

Fuck tha police.100

N.W.A.’s messages of defiance and rejection of entrenched U.S. racism resonated worldwide.101 Admittedly, some of N.W.A.’s content is objectionable in its misogyny, homophobia, and promotion of violence,102 but in *Fuck tha Police*, Ice Cube exposed and educated his listeners to real issues of racism in U.S. law enforcement, including racial profiling, police brutality, siege mentality, and predisposition against minority youth.103 N.W.A. sought to express an inner-city reality that few in America truly appreciated prior to the *Straight Outta Compton* record.104 In fact, the Rodney King debacle105 occurred just two years after the release of *Fuck tha Police*, and while King’s beating shocked some Americans unfamiliar with N.W.A.’s anthem, it merely confirmed ugly American truths: continuing police brutality against minority citizens and siege mentality.106


101. “Its impact was global, with formidable audiences and artist pools in cities such as Paris, Tokyo, Sydney, Cape Town, London, and Bristol, England (where the spin-off trip-hop originated).” Guide to Black History, supra note 50.

102. See Collins, supra note 33.

103. See supra note 56.

104. “Young n***a got it bad ‘cause I’m [B]rown; And not the other color, so police think; They have the authority to kill a minority.” N.W.A., *Fuck tha Police*, on *STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON* (Ruthless Records/Priority Records/EMI Records 1988), lyrics available at http://www.lyricsdepot.com/n-w-a/fuck-tha-police.html.


After shocking the world with *Straight Outta Compton* and enduring an enormous backlash that included FBI attention, protests from various groups including Tipper Gore and C. Delores Tucker, and local law enforcement harassment, N.W.A. released *100 Miles and Runnin’*, wherein the group acknowledged its national impact and chronicled its interactions with the FBI and the California penal system.

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Runnin’ like a n***a I hate to lose;
Show me on the news, but I hate to be abused;
I know it was a set-up;
So now I’m gonna get up;
Even if the FBI wants me to shut up;
But I’ve got 10,000 n***as strong;
They got everybody singin’ my “Fuck Tha Police” song;
And while they treat my group like dirt;
Their whole fuckin’ family is wearing our T-shirts.
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Later, after leaving N.W.A., Ice Cube released the ferociously political records *Kill at Will* and *AmeriKKKas Most Wanted.* These records represented a clear move by Ice Cube from his violent gangsta rap roots to a socially conscious perspective tinged with thug life affect. On the dark narrative hip-hop tale *Dead Homiez*—one that Professor Delgado must surely respect—Ice Cube warns of the problems existing in inner-city America when unemployment runs rampant and opportunities are limited:

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Another homie got murdered on a shakedown;
And his mother is at the funeral, havin’ a nervous breakdown;
Two shots hit him in the face when they blasted;
A framed picture and a closed casket;
A single file line about 50 cars long;
All drivin’ slow with they lights on;
He got a lot of flowers and a big wreath;
What good is that when you’re six feet deep?;
I look at that shit and gotta think to myself;
And thank God for my health;
‘Cause nobody really ever know;
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107. See supra Part II.
108. N.W.A., *100 Miles and Runnin’*, on *100 MILES AND RUNNIN’* (Ruthless Records/Priority Records 1990).

[ion/26cops.html](http://ion/26cops.html) (discussing the death of Sean Bell, who was killed when police officers fired fifty rounds of bullets into his car following his bachelor party the evening before his wedding).
When it's gonna be they family on the front row;  
So I take everything slow, go with the flow;  
And shut my motherfuckin' mouth if I don't know;  
'Cause that's what Pops told me;  
But I wish he could have said it . . . to my dead homiez.

I remember we painted our names on the wall for fun;  
Now it's "Rest in Peace" after every one;  
Except me, but I ain't the one to front;  
Seems like I'm viewin' a body after every month;  
Plus, I knew him when he was yea big;  
Pour beer on the curb before I take a swig;  
But somethin' ain't right;  
When it's a tragedy, that's the only time that the family's tight;  
Lovin' each other in a caring mood;  
There's lots of people and lots of food;  
They say "Be Strong" and you're tryin';  
But how strong can you be when you see your Pops cryin'?;  
So that's why Ice Cube's dressed up;  
Because the city is so fuckin' messed up;  
And everybody is so phony;  
Take a little time . . . to think about your dead homiez.¹¹²

Ice Cube, in the same narrative format championed by Richard Delgado, spun tales and stories in his rhymes. Ice Cube tracks like *Endangered Species (Tales from the Darkside),¹¹³ I Wanna Kill Sam,¹¹⁴* and *The N***a Ya Love to Hate,"¹¹⁵* used the construct of storytelling, counter-storytelling, and parables to break down the walls between the wealthy suburban majority and the poor urban minority.¹¹⁶ As hip-hop became nationally recognized, record sales began to be dominated by White-suburban youth, some of whom embraced hip-hop as a looking glass into the inner-city soul of

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¹¹³. *ICE CUBE FEATURING CHUCK D,* *Endangered Species (Tales from the Darkside),* on AMERIKKKA'S MOST WANTED (Priority Records 1990).


¹¹⁶. See *KITWANA,* WHY WHITE KIDS LOVE HIP HOP, supra note 53 (contextualizing the many ways that White youth have internalized hip-hop music and culture, often in deeply thoughtful and politically conscious ways).
America. Ice Cube plugged into this truism with explosive, narrative rhymes that perpetuated his own brand of politics, social consciousness, and exposed inequality.

Professor Delgado and N.W.A./Ice Cube both expose and decry racism, inequality, and oppression with passion and explosiveness through deeply personal narrative. In Straight Outta Compton, Eazy-E describes the autobiographical nature of the record. N.W.A. avoids overtly political statements, preferring to use personal narrative and harsh experience to illustrate the condition and to challenge those responsible. N.W.A. is gritty, impolitic, and raw, eschewing political messaging and marches, instead intent on subverting, distressing and naming the street reality of police brutality and modern oppression. Similarly, in Imperial Scholar, Delgado identifies the oppression and calls it out, boldly and unafraid, consequences be damned. Both Delgado and N.W.A. identify “the cure” to their detailed experiential ills as furious storytelling—Delgado in A Plea for Narrative and N.W.A. in Fuck tha Police and Gangsta Gangsta.

N.W.A. relates their personal story through criminal exploits, but do not tell this story in a way to be emulated, but rather through an experience forced upon them by the conditions of their existence in America’s inner cities, perpetuated by the existing power structures. Delgado responds to the White liberal elite in much the same way, describing the reality, condemning it, and proposing a much different reality. Like N.W.A. and Ice Cube, Delgado was not polite, politically correct, nor respectful of the establishment. It seemed as if Delgado’s messages were meant to subvert, distress, and name the conditions of oppression, even naming those who purported to be working to change the condition. Delgado and N.W.A. each set cornerstones upon which the house of Critical Race Theory and the hip-hop nation were built.

117. Id.
120. Id.
123. cummings, supra note 14, at 539.
In 1989, Professor Delgado pled for the use of narrative in academic scholarship as a means of changing the perspectives, received wisdoms, paradigms, and entrenched beliefs of the traditional majority.124 This plea landed heavily at the door of the legal academy and the challenge was accepted by a generation of academics who shepherded Critical Race Theory into a powerful legal and academic movement.125 As Delgado was making his academic plea, hip-hop artists were, perhaps unwittingly, embracing this clarion call by using the power of narrative to inform, educate, scare, teach, inspire, and menace the traditional White American regime. Some of the most important hip-hop records of all time were released in the late 1980s and early 1990s, seemingly a direct response to Professor Delgado's plea.126 In genuine ways, hip-hop's narrative tradition informed, educated, and inspired a generation whose life outlook and perspective was changed by hip-hop's narration.127

The Critical Race Theory movement and attendant success and enlightenment drew from many pioneers, leaders, and advocates,128 with Professor Delgado sitting upon the peak of the movement's brightest successes.

IV. Conclusion

For three decades, Critical Race Theory and hip-hop have been radically engaging the traditional majority in this country. Curiously, both of these radical engagements share many of the same characteristics and goals. In stridently challenging American norms, CRT advocates and hip-hop artists brashly suggest a reality completely different from the rest of the country and the world. Through narrative storytelling and funky bass lines, CRT and hip-hop seek to educate, inspire, and motivate a generation. CRT and hip-hop have informed and changed society in compelling ways. The hip-hop nation is growing up and joining

124. Id.
125. Id.
126. Id.

127. See Kitwana, The Hip Hop Generation, supra note 52 (describing the hip-hop generation as “those young African Americans . . . who share a specific set of values and attitudes. At the core are our thoughts about family, relationships, child rearing, career, racial identity, race relations, and politics”); see also Kitwana, Why White Kids Love Hip Hop, supra note 53 (describing the impact hip-hop has had on the way White youth think about race and equality in America).

128. The voices of the Critical Race Theory movement have come from across the world and have prospered and overcome harsh criticism. cummings, supra note 14.
the ranks of lawyers, doctors, engineers, teachers, laborers, professors, and service industry employees. The CRT founders are actively writing and engaging, but also looking to a new generation of scholars and teachers to assume the weight and responsibility of continuing their message.

Members of the hip-hop generation will deeply feel the messages of import delivered by Ice Cube and N.W.A., as described above. Law students and lawyers who study and embrace Critical Race Theory will understand the gravity of Richard Delgado’s writings and the wide-ranging influence of his life. When Professor Delgado’s influence is compared to that of Ice Cube, the hip-hop generation will understand the depth of this homage. Both men have inspired genuine change in U.S. law and culture. Both men continue to influence the attitudes and worldviews of millions.

Richard Delgado has lived a life of astonishing influence. He continues to deliver on the promise of his early revolutionary writing and thinking. Professor Delgado’s example, messages, and writings literally changed the course of the law as it is understood and taught in the United States and abroad. He remains fearless and bold as he still cares little for the status quo conventions of the legal academy.

Professor Richard Delgado and Ice Cube continue today as brothers in arms.