

## Press Release

### **The Glastonbury MLK Community Initiative (GMLKCI) Presents: A Community Conversation: Critical Race Theory - The culture war over America's racial reckoning and its place in public education.**

The GMLKCI invites you to a Community Conversation on May 9, 2022, from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. via a Zoom Webinar. Registration is required. To register, go to GMLKCI's webpage at [www.glastonburymlkci.org](http://www.glastonburymlkci.org) and click on "Register". Or click on the following URL: <https://tinyurl.com/492bxemw>

#### **Moderator: Dean Alfred Carter**

Dean Carter, an educator, sociologist, and humanist, will serve as the program moderator and facilitator.

#### **Panelists:**

##### **1. John Brittain, J.D.**

Professor John Brittain has a B.A. and a J.D. from Howard University. He joined the faculty of the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) David A. Clarke School of Law, in 2009, as a tenured professor of law, and served as Acting Dean from 2018 to 2019. Prior to joining UDC Law, he served as Dean of the Thurgood Marshall School of law at Texas Southern University in Houston, as a tenured law professor at the University of Connecticut School of Law for twenty-two years, and as Chief Counsel and Senior Deputy Director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law in Washington, D.C., a public interest law organization founded by President John F. Kennedy to enlist private lawyers in taking pro bono cases in civil rights.

Prof. Brittain writes and litigates on issues about civil and human rights, especially in education law. Prof. Brittain was one of the original counsel team in Sheff v. O'Neill, the landmark school desegregation case decided by the Connecticut Supreme Court in 1996.

He is presently part of a legal team representing private plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit against the State of Maryland for denying Maryland's historically black institutions of higher learning comparable and competitive opportunities with traditional white universities.

Prof. Brittain has participated in filing nearly a dozen briefs in the U. S. Supreme Court, and was a member of a legal team that filed a friend of the court brief on behalf of the NAACP in the Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education (Louisville) school cases decided by the Supreme Court in 2007, concerning voluntary race-conscious student assignment plans. He filed a friend of the court brief in the Connecticut finance adequacy lawsuit, Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding v. Rell (2010), a landmark case that recognized that Connecticut's Constitution has a qualitative dimension guaranteeing all students an adequate education. Prof. Brittain has an interest in the intersection between housing and school segregation, and the policies that contribute to structural poverty in low-income and neighborhoods of color.

Prof. Brittain has been president of the National Lawyers' Guild, a member of the Executive Committee and the Board of the ACLU, and legal counsel to the NAACP at the local level and national office of the General Counsel.

Prof. Britain will discuss how Critical Race Theory is a framework developed by legal scholars in the 1970s and '80s to examine and understand race in America. It looks at how racism is embedded in present-day laws and society as a result of structures that were put in place throughout U.S. history, like the enslavement of African-Americans. In short, CRT is simply an academic approach used in assessing whether racism is systemic in institutions.

CRT manifests a willingness to see racism more broadly than individual bigotry with influences in both literature and law. Some may perceive it as an affront to America's self-image and history given the role of slavery from its earliest days to the civil war.

CRT combines progressive political struggles for racial justice with critiques of the conventional legal and scholarly norms which are themselves viewed as part of the illegitimate hierarchies that need to be changed. Scholars, most of whom are themselves persons of color, challenge the ways that race and racial power are constructed by law and culture.

One key focus of CRT is addressing the fact that white supremacy and privilege continue despite the rule of law and the constitutional guarantee of equal protection of the laws.

Agreeing with critical theorists and many feminists that law itself is not a neutral tool but instead part of the problem, critical race scholars identify inadequacies of conventional civil rights litigation. Critical race theorists nonetheless fault critical legal scholars as failing to develop much to attract people of color and for neglecting the transformative potential of rights discourse in social movements,

The 1619 Project is a collection of essays and literary works that are aimed at providing a deeper understanding of the history of American slavery and its long-lasting impacts on African-Americans. The Pulitzer Center partnered with The Times to develop curriculum for K-12 educators to use in their classrooms. Data from the Pulitzer Center show that 114 educators in Connecticut have self-reported using the 1619 Project curriculum in their schools.

Prof. Brittain may discuss the positions of critics of CRT such as whether Critical Race Theory is factually incorrect and ignores important historical facts, such as the abolitionist movement among white Christians in the pre-Civil War period, and ignores the ideological underpinnings of CRT which insinuates that America was founded on racism alone and therefore all institutions have been tainted by it.

## **2. Paquita Jarman-Smith, Consultant, State Education Resource Center (SERC)**

Paquita Jarman-Smith has a MA degree in education from New York's Bank Street College of Education and is an Adjunct Instructor of Special Education and Interventions at Central Connecticut State University.

Ms. Jarman-Smith has been a consultant at SERC since 2006, specializing in Early Childhood leadership, administration and supervision. Her background includes curriculum design and implementation, as well as equitable program improvement and quality practices, for programs serving children birth to age 8.

The State Education Resource Center (SERC) is a quasi-public agency established under statute to serve the Connecticut State Board of Education in supporting educational equity and excellence by providing professional development and information dissemination in the latest research and best practices to educators, service providers, and families, as well as job-embedded technical assistance and training within schools, programs, and districts. SERC supports schools in developing effective and equitable classroom practices regarding race.

Educational equity demands access to high-quality educational opportunities that support the success of all students. SERC has developed a comprehensive series of programmatic offerings to ensure that education reflects culturally responsive practices and affirms all identities, advancing family and student engagement in the educational process. These efforts fulfill SERC's statutory obligation to support educational equity and excellence.

In addition, SERC has been tasked with collaborating with the Connecticut State Department of Education on the development and coordination of a prominent new course of studies under Connecticut Public Act 19-12: An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Black and Latino Studies in the Public School Curriculum.

Last summer, SERC published a position statement on Critical Race Theory and Education, sharing the agency's perspective given their role in equity and education. Please see full statement here <https://ctserc.org/news/2019/critical-race-theory-and-education-serc-s-perspective>.

Ms. Jarman-Smith will contribute to the discussion around CRT and education, and the importance of adding the African-American, Black, Puerto Rican and Latino studies to the public school curriculum.

### **3. Mark Pazniokas, Journalist, CT Mirror**

Mr. Pazniokas graduated from Boston University in 1979 with a degree in Journalism.

Mr. Pazniokas was a staff writer at the Journal Inquirer from 1979 through 1984 and at the Hartford Courant from 1984 to 2009. He is a co-founder of the CT Mirror, an online news site owned by the Connecticut News Project, where he has been the Capitol Bureau Chief since September 2009.

Mr. Pazniokas is a frequent contributor to WNPR and a former contributor for The New York Times.

Mr. Pazniokas will discuss his research about CRT much of which has been published in an article titled "Critical race theory roils school board race in Guilford, a town long open to a study of slavery," in the CT Mirror on October 24, 2021. Mr. Pazniokas also co-authored "Critical race theory divides, then unifies Guilford as Republican school board candidates are defeated," published in the CT Mirror on November 2, 2021.

According to Mr. Pazniokas, "Voters in other scattered suburban towns — . . . Glastonbury among them — also said they were drawn to the polls this year to register concern about critical-race theory or opposition to conservatives' intent on putting it ahead of traditional concerns about school spending and quality."

Mr. Pazniokas will discuss how critical race theory was used in the 2021 municipal races, especially Guilford, and how it might be employed in 2022.

**Host:** The Glastonbury MLK Community Initiative's mission is to increase knowledge about, and understanding of, the philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, and to provide leadership and active engagement to build an inclusive community. We believe that bringing people together discuss openly and honestly important issues relating to social justice will help build a more inclusive and tolerant community. As Dr. King noted "...whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly..." and "...the quality of a community is determined by how members of the community relate to one another."

The goal of the GMLKCI Community Conversations program is to engage residents of Glastonbury and surrounding towns in conversations about social justice issues. We believe – especially in today's climate – that we must identify common ground between and among citizens rather than continue to exploit differences. In this way, we can foster meaningful relationships and dialogue and forge a better community.

Our goal is for our panelists to provide both a starting point and a resource for what we hope will be an inspiring, lively, informative, and thought-provoking conversation.

This is a free event open to all. For additional information, please contact Leslie Ohta at 202-538-1161 or at [leslieohta@gmail.com](mailto:leslieohta@gmail.com), or visit [www.glastonburymlkci.org](http://www.glastonburymlkci.org).

This will be a virtual conversation utilizing Zoom Webinar. You do not need a Zoom account in order to join our meeting and you can join for free. Participants can join our meeting from their phone, desktop computer, mobile or tablet devices.

Registration for this Community Conversation is required. To register please log onto the Glastonbury MLK Community Initiative web page at [www.glastonburymlkci.org](http://www.glastonburymlkci.org) and click on "Register."