

“Genesistric Adversarialism”

A Theological Framing of CRT Tenet 1 and Early Racialization

© 2025

Abstract

This paper introduces the term *Genesistric Adversarialism* as a theoretical contribution at the intersection of Theology, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Social Justice. Drawing from CRT Tenet 1, which asserts that racism is ordinary and deeply embedded in U.S. society, this paper argues that racialization and adversarial positioning occur at birth for people of color. Using the birth narrative of Jesus Christ as a theological frame, the paper explores the ways in which infants of color are constructed as threats by systems of authority. The concept is situated alongside two contemporary frameworks—"The Talk" and Racial Battle Fatigue—to evaluate how racial socialization and embodied racial stress emerge across the lifespan. *Genesistric Adversarialism* offers a proactive model for understanding and responding to the earliest points of systemic opposition.

Introduction

In research situated at the intersection of Theology, the Civil Rights Movement, and Social Justice, grounding academic inquiry in a theological framework provides depth and continuity. This assignment, which focuses on defining, creating, or expanding a CRT/CRiT concept, builds upon Critical Race Theory (CRT) Tenet 1— "which asserts that racism is ordinary, deeply embedded in U.S. society, and functions as a normal, everyday experience for people of color" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This ordinariness of racism serves as the conceptual bridge between CRT and the theological narrative presented in this paper.

Theological Framing: The Birth Narrative of Jesus Christ

Christian tradition frequently highlights various elements of the nativity story: the manger, the guiding star, the Magi, and the angelic encounters of Mary and Joseph. However, an often-overlooked element is the immediate threat to Jesus' life after birth. King Herod, fearing the rise of a rival king, issued an edict mandating the murder of all male children two years old and younger. Consequently, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fled to Egypt to escape state-sanctioned violence.

This historical and theological moment illustrates a child's adversarial positioning from birth. Jesus, as an infant, was identified as a threat to political authority simply due to who he was prophesied to become. This narrative provides the theological foundation for developing a new sociopolitical term: *Genesistric Adversarialism*.

Defining Genesistric Adversarialism

Genesistric Adversarialism refers to the condition of being regarded as an adversary to systems and identities of oppression from birth. This concept speaks particularly to children of color, who

are racialized as threats long before they possess awareness, agency, or autonomy. Their bodies are read through cultural scripts of suspicion, fear, and projected deviance embedded within the fabric of U.S. institutions.

While CRT Tenet 1 affirms racism's ordinariness, Genesistric Adversarialism pushes this understanding earlier in the developmental timeline. Rather than beginning in adolescence or adulthood, adversarial positioning begins at the genesis of life.

"The Talk": Racial Socialization and Early Preparation

One lived example of Genesistric Adversarialism appears in the necessity of "The Talk"—a conversation in which Black parents and guardians instruct their children on how to behave around authority figures, particularly police officers. As Lee Cruz (2016) notes, "The reason we have to have this talk is because you are a Black child in America." This preparation is an acknowledgment of the adversarial lens through which society views Black children.

This conversation is rarely optional; it is a mode of survival. I experienced "The Talk" with my father, and I have passed it on to teenage mentees. This transmission of wisdom reflects intergenerational awareness of societal threat.

Racial Battle Fatigue: Embodied Consequences Across the Lifespan

Dr. William Smith's concept of Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) further explains the cumulative and embodied consequences of living under racial stress. Smith defines RBF as "an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that provides a clearer method for understanding the race-related experiences of people of color" (Matthews, 2017). He further asks: "When have Black people been in a post-racial condition? ... We are always living that stress." These symptoms "are constantly occurring, and they are occurring across our lifespan" (Matthews, 2017).

While "The Talk" often enters a child's life during adolescence, and RBF typically appears after prolonged exposure to racial stress, Genesistric Adversarialism asserts that the adversarial relationship with societal systems begins at birth.

Extending CRT Tenet 1 through Genesistric Adversarialism

If racism is ordinary, as CRT Tenet 1 posits, then Genesistric Adversarialism articulates the earliest manifestation of this ordinariness. Children of color encounter adversarial treatment in multiple domains, including:

- surveillance in public spaces,
- questioning during routine activities,
- differential treatment in educational settings, and
- diminished access to recognition, promotion, and opportunity.

Critics may argue that such a framework introduces fatalism or unnecessary fear into the lives of children of color. They may claim that "The Talk," although challenging, is adequate preparation. However, this critique reflects the very ubiquity and normalization of racism. As Smith notes, living with constant vigilance—"always having to have your guard up"—poses the question: "When do you relax? When do you just be yourself?" (Matthews, 2017).

Genesisitric Adversarialism reframes this discourse by acknowledging that children of color are already positioned in adversarial relationships with systems of authority. The concept offers an analytical lens for considering the earliest points of racialization and its long-term effects.

Implications for Parents, Guardians, and Scholars

A possible critique of Genesisitric Adversarialism is that it may lead parents to teach their children that "the world is out to get them." To this, a line from *The Talk* is useful: "So I need you to always be prepared, to always be on guard, and it takes away from you being a little kid, I know, but I am trying to protect you right now" (Cruz, 2016). While spoken initially in the context of police encounters, this sentiment reveals a broader reality: awareness is protective.

The aim of Genesisitric Adversarialism is not to instill fear but to cultivate preparedness. If systems may neglect, harm, or endanger children of color—implicitly or explicitly—then early awareness enables families to navigate these realities with agency. For scholars, this concept provides a framework for analyzing how systemic opposition forms at or before birth and shapes developmental trajectories.

Conclusion

Genesisitric Adversarialism extends CRT Tenet 1 by placing the genesis of racialized adversarial positioning at birth. Through a theological lens grounded in the infancy narrative of Jesus Christ, this framework highlights how systemic authority can target children from their earliest moments. When examined alongside "The Talk" and Racial Battle Fatigue, Genesisitric Adversarialism fills a critical gap: understanding how racialization and systemic suspicion begin before adolescence, before speech, and even before self-awareness. In doing so, this concept empowers communities of color to recognize, name, and navigate the earliest manifestations of racism's ordinariness.

References

Cruz, L. (2016, November 29). *Dear child – When Black parents have to give “The Talk”* [Video]. PBS.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (3rd ed.). New York University Press.

Matthews, P. S. (2017, May 1). *Racial battle fatigue with Dr. William Smith* [Audio podcast episode]. In *The Philippe SHOCK Matthews Show*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYp5A0aQH5c4211034294>