

CBC Sunday School
Critical Race Theory: Why Are We Fighting over Critical Race Theory?
May 8, 2022

I. Discussion Questions

Why do you think the discussion around CRT, or diversity and equity in general, has become prominent and heated in the United States?

II. CRT: A Summary Definition

A. Critical Theory

1. From D. A. Horton¹

- a. Explanatory: Explains what is wrong with social reality, and identifies powers and systems that maintain the problem.
- b. Normative: Demonstrates patterns or repeated evidences of wrong.
- c. Practical: Puts forth achievable, practical means for social change.
- d. Critical: Stands in contrast to prevailing pattern/rhythm of culture.

2. From Neil Shenvi²

- a. Social Binary: Society is divided into oppressed and oppressor groups.
- b. Oppression through Ideology: Oppression occurs through hegemonic power.
- c. Lived Experience: Lived experience gives oppressed groups privileged access to truth.
- d. Social Justice: Social justice demands the liberation of oppressed groups.

B. Critical Race Theory

1. From D. A. Horton³

- a. Race is a manmade construct.
- b. Racism is embedded in American society.
- c. Counter-stories from marginalized people are necessary.
- d. Being “colorblind” is not being truthful.
- e. Racial progress is only made when “white people” are the ones that benefit.
- f. CRT is a theory dealing only and specifically with the United States, and is not intended to be a comprehensive worldview, answering all of life’s most important questions. It is narrow in scope.

2. From Neil Shenvi⁴

- a. Understands race and racism through lens of power.
- b. Racism is deeply embedded in American society.
- c. Supposedly neutral and objective legal standards have been tools for the

¹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/quick-to-listen/critical-race-theory-racism-evangelicals-divided-podcast.html>

² <https://freethinkingministries.com/critical-theory-christianity/>

³ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/podcasts/quick-to-listen/critical-race-theory-racism-evangelicals-divided-podcast.html>

⁴ <https://shenviapolitics.com/critical-race-theory-and-christianity/>

- d. The storytelling and lived experience of people of color is essential to deconstructing racism, as white people are often unable to see racial injustice.
 - e. While focused on the social realities of America, CRT is itself a worldview that answers ultimate questions of life.
 - 3. From Harper, Patten, and Wooden⁵
 - a. Racism is a normal and often hidden part of American life.
 - b. Racial advantage propels the self-interests, power, and privileges of the dominant group.
 - c. CRT gives voice to the unique perspectives and experiences of people of color.
 - d. CRT recognizes interest convergence, in which the power structure allows for racial advances of people of color only when it advances white self-interests.
 - e. Revisionist history calls for American history to be closely scrutinized and reinterpreted.
 - f. Racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status.
 - g. Critiques claims like; a) colorblindness will eliminate racism; b) racism is matter of individuals, not systems; c) one can fight racism without also addressing sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation, and other forms of oppression or injustice.

III. Why Many Advocate or Allow for CRT

- A. The reality of unjust laws based on race/skin color, which carry long-term impact, and some of which were relatively recently still in effect.
 - 1. Bob Jones University banned interracial dating until the year 2000, and then only with a note from students' parents.⁶ It didn't admit black students until 1971.
 - 2. Redlining
 - a. "refusing a loan or insurance to someone because they live in an area deemed to be a poor financial risk."
 - b. "illegal discriminatory practice in which a mortgage lender denies loans or an insurance provider restricts services to certain areas of a community, often because of the racial characteristics of the applicant's neighborhood."
 - c. "The term "redlining" originates with actual red lines on maps that identified predominantly-Black neighborhoods as "hazardous." Starting in the 1930s, the government-sponsored Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Federal Home Loan Bank Board used these maps to deny lending and investment services to Black Americans."⁷
 - d. "In the 1930s, the FHA refused to insure houses for Black families, or even insure houses in white neighborhoods that were too close to Black ones."⁸

⁵ Harper, Patten, and Wooden. "Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis of Policy Efforts," *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 2009, pp. 389-414.

⁶ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bob-jones-spells-out-dating-policy/#:~:text=Bob%20Jones%20University%20may%20have,a%20note%20from%20their%20parents.>

⁷ <https://www.history.com/news/housing-segregation-new-deal-program>

⁸ Ibid.

3. Jim Crow Laws⁹

- a. "Jim Crow laws were state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the Southern United States."
- b. "Although in theory the "equal" segregation doctrine was extended to public facilities and transportation too, facilities for African Americans were consistently inferior and underfunded compared to facilities for white Americans; sometimes, there were no facilities for the black community at all. Far from equality, as a body of law, Jim Crow institutionalized economic, educational, political and social disadvantages and second-class citizenship for most African Americans living in the United States."
- c. Some Jim Crow laws were enforced until 1965.

4. Black Veterans Exclusion from GI Bill

- a. The GI Bill aimed to help World War II veterans by establishing hospitals, making low-interest mortgages available, and granting stipends covering tuition and expenses for veterans attending college or trade schools.
- b. "From the start, Black veterans had trouble securing the GI Bill's benefits. Some could not access benefits because they had not been given an honorable discharge—and a much larger number of Black veterans were discharged dishonorably than their white counterparts. Veterans who did qualify could not find facilities that delivered on the bill's promise... Simple intimidation kept others from enjoying GI Bill benefits."¹⁰
- c. "In an era of rampant racial and gender discrimination, African Americans and women struggled to receive higher education or loans. In some southern states, they were steered to menial jobs instead of college. Even if an African American received tuition money, their choices were slim since many colleges were segregated, especially in the southern states."¹¹

5. Mass Incarceration¹²

- a. Black Americans are much more likely to be incarcerated. "Black people are nearly six times as likely to be incarcerated as white people, and nearly three times as likely to be incarcerated as their Latino counterparts."
- b. Black Americans are disproportionately arrested for drugs, though they are not statistically more likely to use or sell them.
- c. A report from the US Sentencing Commission has shown that black defendants generally receive longer sentences than white defendants for the same crimes.
- d. Either black people are inherently more likely to be violators of the law (a biblically untenable position), or cultural forces in America cause black communities to endure higher rates of incarceration.
- e. The 13th Amendment of the United States Constitution states; "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Crow_laws

¹⁰ <https://www.history.com/news/gi-bill-black-wwii-veterans-benefits>

¹¹ <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/gi-bill>

¹² <https://www.vox.com/2015/7/13/8913297/mass-incarceration-maps-charts>

- B. Often CRT is unhelpfully wielded as a means to avoid the harder discussion of ethnic/racial disparity or inequality.
1. Some black Christians have voiced that when they address racism or inequality, the discussion becomes a debate about CRT, which was not their original intent. Many would not know what CRT is, or be proponents of it.
 2. Many don't necessarily promote CRT, but are fatigued by those who constantly argue against CRT, and feel this may be a distraction from the real issue. As a result, they will not join in on the argument against CRT.
 3. Some feel that they are bringing forward real concerns about mistreatment and hurt, and are being roped into an academic debate.
 - a. "The church is being brought ethical concerns, and is responding with epistemological critique. That's like a man telling you he's bleeding, and you asking him, "How did you come to that conclusion." Rasool Berry¹³
 - b. At that point, those arguing about CRT come across like Job's friends.
 - c. If a community is feeling and claiming hurt and pain, our first instinct should not be argumentation but compassion. This does not mean all claims of offense must be believed and accepted. But our disposition should be compassion, and a desire to weep with those who weep.
 4. Accusations of using CRT can be a tool to dismissively label someone as being anti-biblical or divisive, and can be weaponized to avoid legitimate discussion.
- C. Some argue that the Christians have not offered a compelling and convincing position on race and ethnicity (specifically in the American context). So CRT fills a void.
1. When we only argue against a position, and do not offer a positive, redemptive, and biblical approach, it can seem as if we are only against helping or hearing others.
 2. Scripture has much to say about ethnicity, the sin of partiality, institutional/corporate sin, reconciliation, and other matters relevant to race and ethnic tension in the US.
 3. Christians of all people have the tools (i.e. the only infallible word) to speak to such things. This is especially crucial when Scripture has been misused to justify slavery.
- D. Many simply argue that CRT helps us to see societal problem and injustices that we would not otherwise easily see.
- a. I can recognize that I do not know what it is like to give birth to children. In the same way, I do not what it is like to live in the United States as a black person. It may be that the CRT framework can help me think more sympathetically and understandingly of others' experiences.
 - b. In that regard, it may be a helpful tool, even if we don't agree with every facet or proponent of CRT.
- E. Many Christians are comfortable stating that women and people of the LGBTQ community do face forms of oppression in the US.
- a. They sympathize with disparity and oppression without also affirming feminist or LGBTQ theory, LGBTQ agenda, or defining oppression in all the same ways.
 - b. They are thus not as troubled by CRT, and use it to examine oppression.

¹³ <https://www.premierchristianradio.com/Shows/Saturday/Unbelievable/Episodes/Unbelievable-Is-Critical-Race-Theory-compatible-with-Christianity-Neil-Shenvi-Rasool-Berry>

IV. Why Many Critique or Are Concerned about CRT

- A. While CRT may have begun as a legal theory, modern expressions have moved beyond the academy and into the workplace and educational systems, with practical impact.
 - 1. Those debating an academic theory often neglect that real-life impact it has on the “layperson.”
 - 2. The proliferation of DEI training, which often contains unbiblical assumptions, makes many more and more wary to CRT, which often informs said DEI courses.
 - 3. Regardless of level of concern, or personal opinion about CRT, it is increasingly hard to deny that CRT is informing education at all levels.¹⁴
- B. Many white people feel attacked by CRT, and feel as though they are being blamed and guilty for something outside of their control or responsibility.
 - 1. To what extent should we or can we be held accountable for the sins of our fathers? Should we repent of the sins of the past?
 - 2. Some feel as though they are blamed for America’s past, when they have no legitimate connection to or heritage tied to historic American injustices.
 - 3. What power do we have to change national power structures? Is our job simply to love our brother/sister where we live, or do we have a higher obligation to change societal patterns?
- C. Those who promote CRT almost always simultaneously advocate beliefs that are unbiblical and troubling, some of which are purported to be inextricable from CRT.
 - 1. Critical theory and CRT advocates generally also advocate for LGBTQ acceptance, stating that you cannot be anti-racist without also being “anti-homophobia.”
 - 2. Ibram X. Kendi, a leading CRT proponent, says to be an anti-racist is to be a feminist, and that we cannot be anti-racist if we are “homophobic” and “transphobic.”
 - 3. Many who would be proponents of CRT would also say we must dismantle any notion of biblical gender roles.
 - 4. CRT advocates also often see standards and laws as the unjust products of those in power, as opposed to universally good laws and standards. This leaves little room for a concept of “the law of God,” and wars against standards of truth and righteousness.
- D. Many are concerned that CRT actually does what it aims to alleviate – promote racism and further oppression.
 - 1. Many fear that CRT only further and perpetually categorizes people by skin color, which actually engrains unhelpful stereotypes, and feelings of powerlessness.
 - 2. Many are concerned that the persistent association of blame or privilege to specific skin colors only continues to divide people by color.
 - 3. There is additionally concern about the effect of perpetually labeling people as disadvantaged or oppressed, and thereby engraining both a feeling of helplessness and diminished expectations of success. This could result in further setting up some for success and others for failure.

¹⁴ <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-critical-race-theory-isnt-a-curriculum-its-a-practice/2021/05>

- E. Some who strongly advocate for objective truth are uncomfortable with the reality of different perspectives.
 - 1. We may freely admit that, while objective truth exists, some may be able to perceive it better than others, and our experiences do play a role in our ability to perceive truth.
 - 2. We can learn from others' experiences. We can affirm this importance of perspective, while still maintaining the ultimate authority, sufficiency, and clarity of Scripture.
 - 3. That said, there is real concern if the desire to hear from different perspectives leads to a postmodern undermining of objective and normative truth, where ultimate truth is in the eye of the beholder.
- F. Many are uncomfortable with the project of examining American history, or revising and rewriting history.
 - 1. It may be that the way we teach our history needs to be revised and updated, and include stories that have been lost.
 - 2. There may be good reason to be wary of reimagining history through modern lenses.
 - 3. The goal of good history ought to be the goal of good exegesis, to determine as best as possible meaning and truth as originally perceived and delivered.
- G. CRT, and other critical theories, seek to eliminate all forms of injustice and inequity, but the definitions of injustice, inequity can be stretched dangerously and broadly.
 - 1. For example, it is a privilege and advantage to be born with two parents in a loving and committed marriage. Is this an advantage that should be eliminated?
 - 2. It is a privilege to have more wealth than others. Should all wealth disparity be eliminated? Some critical theorists advocate for this, which sparks concerns about Marxism.

V. Other Considerations

- A. No culture is monolithic. We should not assume that all black people, white people, or people of any color or ethnicity will all think about and assess CRT in the same way.
- B. We should think soberly about the actual threat of CRT, especially in light of other areas of concern in the church. How much of our bandwidth should this consume?
 - 1. Does the debate about CRT distract us from putting forth a biblical stance toward ethnicity, and keep us from necessary progress?
 - 2. Is CRT more harmful to the church than other pervasive sins, heresies, etc.? What should be our primary concerns?
 - 3. Has CRT caused some to adopt unorthodox beliefs and practices? Our response should stand in proportion to the threat.
 - a. As will be discussed next week, CRT is an actual threat, does contain unbiblical concepts, and should be addressed.
 - b. At the same time, it would be a stretch to say it is the biggest threat facing the church. The largest threats to the church are almost never heterodox teachings infiltrating from the outside, but sins that are already pervasive within.

- C. Some cultures think more “communally,” while others think more “individually.”
 - 1. Anecdotally and generally speaking, “black culture” tends to think more corporately than “white culture.” For example, when a black person dies at the hands of police (regardless of the context), the black community, if such a thing exists, will tend to mourn the death as its first response. White people generally don’t seem to have the same response.
 - 2. Whether and to what extent with think corporately or individually will have an impact on how we view CRT.
- D. Don’t forget the devil exists, and loves to sow division in the church.
 - 1. This does not mean we don’t address issues with biblical care, or address real concerns with righteousness, grace, and truth.
 - 2. But let’s always make sure we address issues without divisive spirits. The devil loves to find ways to anger, distract, and divide the church.
- E. The concept of privilege can be humbling, which our pride wars against.
 - 1. All of us like to think that we are where we are because of something good in us.
 - 2. All of us are privileged in many ways, and more so than we could possibly understand. All of us deserve death. So we should not have trouble admitting privilege, and that we have been greatly blessed.

VI. Discussion Questions

Considering all the reasons for disagreement and contention around CRT and/or racism in the US, how should Christians approach the discussion?