

Critical Race Theory
The Christian Faith and Contemporary Challenges
April 25, 2021

“I hope we’ll see more and more Christian organizations commit publicly and explicitly to rejecting both racism and Critical Race Theory.” – Neil Shenvi

I. Introduction – Eph 4:15 – *“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ ...”*

II. Critical Race Theory

- A. CRT is a prominent critical social theory that challenges and investigates the ways in which race, racism, and racial power (with particular emphasis on an expanded definition of white supremacy) are constructed in American legal culture, and more broadly, in American society, in order radically to change it.¹

“As I see it, critical race theory recognizes that revolutionizing a culture begins with the radical assessment of it.” – Derrick A. Bell, “Who’s Afraid of Critical Race Theory?” 893.

*“Critical race theory builds on the insights of two previous movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism.” – Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 5.*

“Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.” – Delgado and Stefancic, 3.

III. Key Tenets of Critical Race Theory:²

- A. **Racism is inevitable and inescapable** – *“CRT starts from the premise that race and racism are central, endemic, permanent and a fundamental part of defining and explaining how US society functions.”*
1. Observation 1 – “Race” here is viewed as a social construct (not rooted in human nature or biology), engineered for the purpose of European colonialism and the Atlantic Slave Trade.
 2. Observation 2 – “Racism” here includes more than individual attitudes and actions, but includes systems, discourses, etc., even where no individual racist/bigoted actions are at work.
- B. **A neutral or evidence-based approach to addressing racism is illegitimate** – *“CRT challenges White privilege and refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity. CRT challenges notions of ‘neutral’ research or ‘objective’ researchers and exposes deficit-informed research that silences, ignores and distorts epistemologies of People of Color.”*

¹ See Pat Sawyer, “Framing Critical Race Theory. Part 1: What is CRT, and Should We Be Concerned?” byFaith. April 5, 2021. <https://byfaithonline.com/what-is-crt-and-should-we-be-concerned/> (accessed April 22, 2021).

² Quotes taken from Tara J. Yasso, “Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth,” *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8, no. 1 (March 2005): 69–91.

1. Observation 1 – “Systemic racism” endemic to US society is often (and confusingly) understood and discussed as a perpetuation of “Whiteness,” “White privilege,” and/or “White supremacy” (defined as the normalization of white people and the marginalization of POC).

“While the term, white supremacy, carries the freight of a moral breach and cultural scourge, the cultural or societal phenomenon being described often (not always) refers to something that is merely a product of white majoritarianism and consequently something not automatically immoral and/or something that is actually intrinsic to humanness and not whiteness exclusively.” – Pat Sawyer, “Framing Critical Race Theory”

- C. **CRT seeks liberation from the hegemonic oppression intrinsic to the racial hierarchy in America** – *“CRT is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender and class oppression (Matsuda, 1991). Such a social justice research agenda exposes the ‘interest-convergence’ (Bell, 1987) of civil rights ‘gains’ in education and works toward the elimination of racism, sexism and poverty, as well as the empowerment of People of Color and other subordinated groups.”*

“In its traditional usage, oppression means the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group ... In its new usage oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society.”
 – Iris Young, *The Five Faces of Oppression*, 5.

1. Observation 1 – Tenet 3 makes it difficult, if not impossible, to appreciate the real progress regarding civil rights for African Americans since the era of slavery and Jim Crow.

*“The claim of ‘not racist’ neutrality is a mask for racism... The language of colorblindness—like the language of ‘not racist’ — is a mask to hide racism.” – Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Anti-Racist*, 9–10.*

2. Observation 2 – Among its popular advocates, CRT traces all disparities of outcome between racial groups to racism and racist policies.

*“As an anti-racist, when I see racial disparities, I see racism.” – Ibram X. Kendi, *NYT* (March 27, 2018).*

- D. **Knowledge derived from “lived experience” is critical and authoritative when it comes to race and racism** – *“CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination.”*
 - E. **CRT is interdisciplinary and seek liberation across a wide-range of fields** – *“CRT goes beyond disciplinary boundaries to analyze race and racism within both historical and contemporary contexts, drawing on scholarship from ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, law, psychology, film, theatre and other fields.”*
1. Observation 1 – Through its concept of “intersectionality” (i.e., “Race, class, gender, and similar systems of power are interdependent and mutually construct one another” [Collins]), CRT envisions interlocking systems of oppression which must be disrupted *together*.

“Antiracist policies cannot eliminate class racism without anticapitalism policies. Anticapitalism cannot eliminate class racism without antiracism.”

“To truly be antiracist is to be feminist. To truly be feminist is to be antiracist.”

*“We cannot be antiracist if we are homophobic or transphobic... To be queer antiracist is to understand the privileges of my cisgender, of my masculinity, of my heterosexuality, of their intersections.” – Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Anti-Racist*, 158, 189, 197.*

IV. Recommended Reading

- A. Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask About Social Justice* (Zondervan, 2020)
- B. Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Pitchstone, 2020)
- C. Jonathan Butcher and Mike Gonzalez, “Critical Race Theory, the New Intolerance, and Its Grip on America,” *The Heritage Foundation: Backgrounder*, No. 3567 (December 7, 2020) – available at <http://report.heritage.org/bg3567>
- D. George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Accountability* (Intervarsity, 2006)