

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

TERMS TO KNOW

HERITAGE ACTION
FOR AMERICA

CRT & HOW IT'S APPLIED:

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

While CRT began as an academic theory claiming that America is systemically racist and must be dismantled, it is a worldview that is being applied in practice via activism and [calls for](#) moral, economic, and political revolution to fundamentally transform society. CRT proponent Kimberlé Crenshaw defines CRT as “not as a noun, but a verb. It cannot be confined to a static and narrow definition but is an evolving and malleable practice.” CRT does not always manifest as a curriculum, but rather should be thought of as a lens through which any curriculum can be taught.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)

DEI initiatives are typically public commitments or departments tasked with closing outcome disparity gaps between various demographic groups through training, quotas, and cultural changes in an organization. DEI initiatives often lead to the categorization of individuals according to demographic groups and adverse or advantageous treatment on the basis of membership in said groups. DEI is a marketing tool of CRT.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

A [widespread](#) method of child development that incorporates cognitive skills, emotional competencies, and social and interpersonal skills. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) holds up SEL as a [tool](#) to advance “educational equity,” claiming it “help[s] address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to...contribute to...just communities.” SEL has become a delivery mechanism for CRT.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

[Culturally Responsive Teaching](#) is a method of teaching rooted in the philosophy of Critical Race Theory that emphasizes the inclusion of students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning. According to Stephen Sawchuk, Associate Editor of [EducationWeek](#), culturally responsive teaching “seeks to affirm students’ ethnic and racial backgrounds,” and is related to Critical Race Theory “in that one of its aims is to help students identify and critique the causes of social inequality in their own lives.

ACTION CIVICS

It [encourages](#) students to participate in issue lobbying, protests, and activism as a hands-on way of learning about civics. Action civics often teaches or requires a specific assigned stance (usually left-leaning) and students are forced to adopt it. It frequently leads to students lobbying for things like unionization of workers, transgender rights, or taking part in Black Lives Matter protests. It is an application mechanism of CRT.

INCLUSIVITY EDUCATION

A method by which a diverse collection of students are put together in the same classroom to learn, with critical theorists [claiming](#) that “learners need to form an awareness of the various levels of inequity while being able to face the opposite voices,” and that “school curriculum must be inclusive of individual differences such as racial backgrounds and social objectives.” There is nothing wrong with classroom diversity, but hyper-focusing on supposed inequity and framing people’s voices as “opposite” due to their characteristics is a dangerous application of CRT.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

According to the [American Psychological Association](#), cultural competence is the ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one’s own. Cultural competence has morphed into a means to address racial or cultural disparities through recognizing differences between groups of people and seeking diverse perspectives, often to the exclusion of valid views held by people who happen to not be minorities.

ABOLITIONIST TEACHING

Coined by [Bettina L. Love](#), author and the Athletic Association Endowed Professor at the University of Georgia, the self-described goal of abolitionist teaching is “intersectional social justice for equitable classrooms that love and affirm Black and Brown children.” Love [claims](#) that white teachers cannot love or care for students of differing ethnicities because of their different “lived experiences.” In her book *We Want To Do More Than Survive*, Love argues that teachers should educate about racial violence, oppression, resistance, and social change. Abolitionist teachers use agitating and activism in the classroom to advocate for [abolishing institutions like police, courts, and prisons](#) to transform schools and communities.

CRT MESSAGING TERMS:

ANTI-RACISM

CRT proponents claim that to be an “antiracist” means to actively oppose racism, not with sentiments or by not being racist, but rather with actions opposing anything that is allegedly racist. In practice, this is achieved through actual racism. In his book *How To Be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi claims, “[t]he only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination.” Rather than reducing racism, CRT proponents prescribe more racism.

EQUITY

While the word itself has historically meant fairness or impartiality, it has come to be used to refer to equality of outcomes, often achieved by active discrimination, advantageous or adverse treatment, and redistribution. According to CRT proponents, equity is supposedly achieved through these routes not just to account for present circumstances, but in order to make up for past wrongs.

MARGINALIZED / VULNERABLE IDENTITIES

Groups made up of people that critical theorists claim [experience](#) social and/or political inequality through their viewpoints being under-represented, silenced, or ignored.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

It [refers](#) to the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. A call for social justice assumes the status quo is unjust and prescribes redistribution or unequal treatment in furtherance of the goal of “equity” or “social justice.”

STRUCTURAL / SYSTEMIC / INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

A concept claiming that societal structures such as laws, norms, processes, or regulations are racist. CRT proponents define as “racist” anything that leads to unequal outcomes resulting from equally applied structures.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

A prejudice someone supposedly holds without realizing it. CRT theorists claim everyone holds unconscious biases.

CRT CONCEPTS:

COLLECTIVE GUILT

CRT proponents believe that individuals within a certain race, sex, or religion are inherently responsible for things done in the past by other members of the same group.

DOMINANT DISCOURSES

Proponents of CRT describe dominant discourses as prevailing ways of talking or thinking about certain subjects, which they believe must be challenged and replaced.

HEGEMONY

According to Oxford Languages, hegemony is “leadership or dominance, especially by one...social group over others.

INTERSECTIONALITY

CRT proponents chalk up a person’s identity to one’s combination or “intersection” of characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, etc. and believe the person is privileged or oppressed to varying degrees as a result of these various characteristics.

INTERNALIZED RACISM

As defined in a [University of Missouri DEI training](#), internalized racism is “the learned form of prejudice we have towards people of different races or ethnicities...present in our thinking process and actions..., manifest[ing] in two ways: Internalized oppression...[and] Internalized privilege.” Just as with the more agreeably named “unconscious bias,” critical theorists claim we all have this in some form or degree.

NORMATIVITY

The [designation](#) by a culture of some actions or outcomes as good or desirable or permissible and others as bad or undesirable or impermissible. CRT theorists challenge these societal norms as racist or unjust depending on the race of the culture that shaped them.

OPPRESSION, OPPRESSOR, OPPRESSED

Critical theorists hold that oppression—or unjust treatment—applies to groups of people. They lump individuals into groups of “oppressors” or “oppressed” according to their attributes and what portion of the population these groups represent.

SYSTEMS OF POWER AND OPPRESSION

The idea that all societies can be defined by the systems that make them up. CRT theorists claim that systems such as a nation's laws are inherently biased because they were written by people of mainly one race, and as a result, by definition those systems empower the group that wrote them or oppress those who didn't. CRT proponents "examine systems" in attempts to identify and dismantle those that they deem "racist" or "oppressive."

WHITE FRAGILITY

According to CRT theorist Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, it is "the defensive reactions... white people have when [their] racial worldviews, positions, or advantages are questioned or challenged."

CRT THEORISTS & PROPONENTS:

DARNISA AMANTE-JACKSON

A "Racial Equity Strategist and Educator," and prominent teacher of CRT.

DERRICK BELL

Founder of CRT, and Harvard academic. Argued that CRT scholarship should incite rebellion and "most critical race theorists are committed to a program of scholarly resistance, and most hope scholarly resistance will lay the groundwork for wide-scale resistance." Author of *Race, Racism and American Law*.

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW

The CRT legal scholar who coined the term "intersectionality."

PATRISSE CULLORS

Founder of the Black Lives Matter organization, and a CRT practitioner that identifies as a trained Marxist.

RICHARD DELGADO

Co-author, along with his wife, Jean Stefancic, of possibly the most widely read primer on CRT, *Critical Race Theory, An Introduction*.

ROBIN DIANGELO

Author of *White Fragility*, and a prominent teacher of CRT/DEI trainings.

ALICIA GARZA

Founder of the Black Lives Matter organization, and also behind the organization *Movement 4 Black Lives*. Both groups seek to advance CRT and Marxism.

ANGELA P. HARRIS

A major early figure of CRT, and law professor. In her writings, she explains how CRT inherits from its Critical Legal Theory ancestor the commitment to dismantle all aspects of society.

NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES

Creator of the 1619 Project, a series of essays to teach American history [through a CRT lens](#).

IBRAM X. KENDI

Author of How To Be an Antiracist, and one of the most popular teachers of CRT/DEI trainings.

CHARLES LAWRENCE

CRT theorist and law professor, who [rejected the idea](#) that laws can be written from a neutral perspective. Instead, he asserted that we all speak from a particular point of view, which he calls a “positioned perspective.”

HERBERT MARCUSE

Assistant to the president of the marxist Frankfurt School. Marcuse remained in the U.S. after WWII and became a leading spokesman of the New Left, a political movement with an [emphasis](#) on cultural and political transformation via class struggle. A CRT theorist, he saw minorities as a group that held potential to have grievances stoked among them, be ideologically led, and incited to revolution.

GLENN E. SINGLETON

A prominent teacher of CRT/DEI trainings.

JEAN STEFANCIC

Co-author, along with her husband, Richard Delgado, of [perhaps the most widely read primer on CRT](#), Critical Race Theory, An Introduction.

OPAL TOMETI

Founder of the [Black Lives Matter organization](#), and a CRT practitioner.