

CRITICAL RACE THEORY BRIEFING BOOK

By Christopher Rufo

DEFINITION

Critical race theory is an academic discipline that holds that the United States is a nation founded on white supremacy and oppression, and that these forces are still at the root of our society. Critical race theorists believe that American institutions, such as the Constitution and legal system, preach freedom and equality, but are mere “camouflages” for naked racial domination. They believe that racism is a constant, universal condition: it simply becomes more subtle, sophisticated, and insidious over the course of history. In simple terms, critical race theory reformulates the old Marxist dichotomy of oppressor and oppressed, replacing the class categories of bourgeoisie and proletariat with the identity categories of White and Black. But the basic conclusion is the same: in order to liberate man, society must be fundamentally transformed through moral, economic, and political revolution.

Further Reading

- Hillsdale *Imprimis*: “Critical Race Theory: What It Is and How to Fight It.” [Link](#).
- Heritage Foundation: “Critical Race Theory Would Not Solve Racial Inequality: It Would Deepen It.” [Link](#).

KEY CONCEPTS AND QUOTATIONS

Race essentialism: Critical race theory reduces individuals to the quasi-metaphysical categories of “Blackness” and “Whiteness,” then loads those categories with value connotations—positive traits are attributed to “Blackness” and negative traits are attributed to “Whiteness.” Although some critical race theorists formally reject race essentialism, functionally, they often use these categories as malicious labels that erase individual identities.

- “Whiteness is dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels. These processes and practices include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people.” Robin DiAngelo, “White Fragility.”
- “Whiteness is an invisible veil that cloaks its racist deleterious effects through individuals, organizations, and society. The result is that White people are allowed to enjoy the benefits that accrue to them by virtue of their skin color. Thus, Whiteness, White supremacy, and White privilege are three interlocking forces that disguise racism so it may allow White people to oppress and harm persons of color while maintaining their individual and collective advantage and innocence.” Derald Sue, “The Invisible Whiteness of Being.”
- “Whiteness by its very definition and operation as a key element of white supremacy kills; it is mental and physical terrorism. To end the white terrorism that is directed at racially oppressed people here and in other nations, it is essential that self-identified whites and their whiteness

collaborators among the racially oppressed confront their white problem head-on, unencumbered by racial comfort.” Johnny Williams in the *Hartford Courant*.

All whites are racist: Critical race theorists argue explicitly that “all white people are racist” and perpetuate systems of white supremacy and systemic racism. This concept is deeply related to race essentialism—whites, including small children, cannot escape from being racist.

- “All white people are racist or complicit by virtue of benefiting from privileges that are not something they can voluntarily renounce.” Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good*.
- “White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy.” Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.
- “According to studies, babies at two to three years old, start internalizing racist ideas, start discerning and making decisions based on racist ideas ... We’re allowing our society to raise them to be racist.” Ibram Kendi on KING5 News.

America is a fundamentally racist nation: Critical race theorists argue that American was founded on racism, slavery, and white supremacy—and remains a fundamentally racist nation to this day.

- “White people raised in Western society are conditioned into a white supremacist worldview because it is the bedrock of our society and its institutions ... Entering the conversation with this understanding is freeing because it allows us to focus on how—rather than if—our racism is manifest.” Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*.
- “America is inherently a ‘white’ country: in character, in structure, in culture. Needless to say, black Americans create lives of their own. Yet, as a people, they face boundaries and constrictions set by the white majority. America’s version of *apartheid*, while lacking overt legal sanction, comes closest to the system even now being reformed in the land of its invention.” Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations*.
- “It is a racial crime to be yourself if you are not White in America. It is a racial crime to look like yourself or empower yourself if you are not White.” Ibram Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*.

Collective guilt: Critical race theory claims that individuals categorized as “White” are inherently responsible for injustice and oppression committed by white populations in the past. This concept is sometimes framed as “white guilt,” “white shame,” and “white complicity,” which are psychological manifestations of collective guilt.

- “Many critical race theorists and social scientists alike hold that racism is pervasive, systemic, and deeply ingrained. If we take this perspective, then no white member of society seems quite so innocent.” Delgado & Stefani, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*.
- “All whites are racist ... because we benefit from systemic white privilege. Generally whites think of racism as voluntary, intentional conduct done by horrible others. Whites spend a lot of time trying to convince ourselves and each other that we are not racist. A big step would be for whites to admit that we are racist and then to consider what to do about it.” Wildman and Davis, *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*.

Opposition to equality under the law: Critical race theorists explicitly reject the principle of equality under the law, including the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. They argue that legal equality, nondiscrimination, and colorblindness are mere “camouflages” (Tate, 1997) used to uphold white supremacist structures.

- “Unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces 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 & Stefanic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*.
- “[Critical race theorists] are also highly suspicious of another liberal mainstay, namely, rights ... Think how that system applauds affording everyone equality of opportunity but resists programs that assure equality of results.” Delgado & Stefanic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*.

Opposition to meritocracy: Critical race theorists oppose meritocracy, especially standardized testing and competitive admissions in the education system. They claim that meritocracy is a mechanism to uphold racist structures and is derived from “racism, nativism, and eugenics” (Au, 2013).

- “White people are raised on five strong cultural myths: meritocracy, manifest destiny, white racelessness, monoculture, and white moral and managerial superiority. These lay the foundation for our feeling good about ourselves as white people, and they work in us to override and discredit counter-evidence.” Peggy McIntosh, “White People Facing Race: Uncovering Myths that keep Racism in Place.”
- “The ideologies of meritocracy, equal opportunity, individualism, and human nature we described above play a powerful role in denying the current of privilege and insisting that society is just.” Ozlem & DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*.

Active racial discrimination: Critical race theorists believe that the state must actively discriminate against racial groups that are deemed “privileged,” meaning whites and sometimes Asians. Critical race theorists support policies such as racial quotas, race-based benefits, and race-based redistribution of wealth.

- “The 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.” Ibram Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*.
- “Formal equality overlooks structural disadvantage and requires mere nondiscrimination or ‘equal treatment’; by contrast, affirmative action calls for *equalizing treatment* by redistributing power and resources in order to rectify inequities and to achieve real equality.” Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property.”

Restriction of free speech: Critical race theorists believe that the First Amendment serves to advance the interests of white supremacy and systemic racism, under the guise of freedom of speech. They argue that the government should restrict freedom of speech that is “racist” or “hateful.”

- “The American marketplace of ideas was founded with the idea of the racial inferiority of non-whites as one of its chief commodities, and ever since the market opened, racism has remained its most active item in trade.” Mari Matsuda, et. al., *Words That Wound*.

- “[Critical race theorist Mari] Matsuda suggested the creation of a legal doctrine to limit hate speech in cases where the message is one of racial inferiority, the message is directed against a historically oppressed group, and the message is persecutorial, hateful, and degrading.” *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*.
- “The DOA [or Department of Antiracism, as proposed by Kendi] would be empowered with disciplinary tools to wield over and against policymakers and public officials who do not voluntarily change their racist policy and ideas.” Ibram Kendi, “Inequality: Pass an Anti-Racist Constitutional Amendment.”

Abolition of whiteness: Critical race theorists believe that society should work to “abolish the white race.” Although they often insist that this means dismantling cultural constructions associated with white identity, this language often adopts tropes associated with race eliminationism.

- “We believe that so long as the white race exists, all movements against what is called ‘racism’ will fail. Therefore, our aim is to abolish the white race.” Noel Ignatiev in *Critical Whiteness Studies*.
- “Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity.” Noel Ignatiev in the film *Indoctrinate U*.
- “If you abolish slavery, you abolish slaveholders. If you want to abolish racial oppression, you do away with whiteness.” Noel Ignatiev in the film *Indoctrinate U*.

Neo-segregation: Critical race theorists endorse a new form of racial segregation—often called “racial affinity groups” or “racial caucuses”—with separate meetings, facilities, living quarters, and training programs for whites and racial minorities. The assumption is that whites must “do the work” to address their “internalized racial superiority” and racial minorities must be protected from invasive “whiteness.”

- “Multi-racial space often results in the people of color—who have been most harmed by structural racism—carrying an additional burden of educating others (at best) or being retraumatized through the reliving of painful experiences.” JustLead Washington, *Caucuses as a Racial Justice Strategy*.
- “In a RAG [racial affinity group], white people can discover together their group identity. They can cultivate racial solidarity and compassion and support each other in sitting with the discomfort, confusion, and numbness that often accompany white racial awakening. They can also discern white privilege and its impact without the aid of or dependence on POC.” Ruth King, *Transforming Racism From The Inside Out*.

Anti-capitalism and forced redistribution of property: Critical race theorists have adopted the core Marxist position of anti-capitalism, arguing that America is an “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2012). They argue that “whiteness, initially constructed as a form of racial identity, evolved into a form of property” (Harris, 1993), allowing whites to extend domination from slavery into the free-market society. The solution is to redistribute private property and dismantle the system of capitalism.

- “In order to truly be anti-racist, you also have to truly be anti-capitalist.... And in order to truly be anti-capitalist, you have to be antiracist, because they’re interrelated.” Ibram Kendi, “Ibram X. Kendi on Why We Need to Fight Racism the Way We Fight Cancer.”

- “In challenging the property interest in whiteness, affirmative action [in support of property redistribution] could facilitate the destruction of the false premises of legitimacy and exclusivity inherent in whiteness and break the distorting link between white identity and property ... Existing distributions of property will be modified by rectifying unjust loss and inequality. Property rights will then be respected, but they will not be absolute and will be considered against a societal requirement of affirmative action.” Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property.”

WINNING THE LANGUAGE WAR

The critical race theorists have constructed a series of powerful linguistic tools. To successfully fight against critical race theory, we must adopt language that is trenchant, persuasive, and resonates with the public. Here are some powerful words and phrases to include in your communications.

Defining critical race theory

- “Race-based Marxism”
- “State-sanctioned racism”
- “Woke racism”
- “Racial engineering”
- “Critical race theory divides Americans into oppressor and oppressed based on their skin color.”
- “Critical race theory says the solution to past discrimination is present discrimination. I reject this. Racism is always wrong.”
- “I oppose racism, whether it comes from the Klan or from critical race theory.”
- “Critical race theory teaches that individualism, rationality, and hard work are racist. This is an insult to hard-working American families of all racial backgrounds.”
- “Critical race theory rejects the idea of equal protection under the law. I believe everyone has the right to equal treatment, no matter where they come from.”

Critical race theory in schools

- “Race reeducation programs”
- “Neo-racist theories have no place in public education.”
- “Critical race theory teaches children that they are defined by their race, not as individuals.”
- “Critical race theory teaches children to hate each other and hate their country.”
- “Critical race theorists have the right to express their beliefs as individuals; they do not have the right to use taxpayer money to indoctrinate children.”
- “Critical race theory is not a free speech issue; it’s a compelled speech issue. Public schools do not have the right to violate a child’s conscience.”

- “We must prioritize excellence, which inspires people from all racial backgrounds to achieve their potential.”
- “Our goal is diversity without division.”

Anti-CRT legislation

- “Neo-racist theories have no place in our public institutions.”
- “Public institutions must reflect the values of the public—not fringe racial theories that seek to divide Americans into oppressor and oppressed.”
- “This bill does not prevent schools from teaching about racism, slavery, and segregation. It prohibits schools from indoctrinating students into fringe racial theories that claim one race is superior to another or that individuals should be treated differently on the basis of race.”
- “This is not a free speech issue; it’s a compelled speech issue. The government does not have the right to force individuals to believe in race essentialism, collective guilt, or racial superiority theory.”
- “Free speech was designed to protect the individual against the government, not to empower the government to force individuals to believe in fringe racial theories.”
- “This legislation is about limited government—public institutions can no longer promote racist theories using taxpayer dollars.”

USING STORIES TO BUILD THE ARGUMENT

The strongest line of attack against critical race theory is to cite specific stories about critical race theory in practice. When you are designing your communications, weave in stories about the reality of critical race theory in American institutions. Ground your argument in facts and force your opponents to defend the indefensible.

Critical race theory in schools

- Seattle Public Schools told teachers that the education system is guilty of “spirit murder” against black children and that white teachers must “bankrupt [their] privilege in acknowledgement of [their] thieved inheritance.” [Link](#).
- San Diego Public Schools accused white teachers of being colonizers on stolen Native American land and told them “you are racist” and “you are upholding racist ideas, structures, and policies.” They recommended that the teachers undergo “antiracist therapy.” [Link](#).
- A Cupertino, California, elementary school forced third-graders to deconstruct their racial and sexual identities, then rank themselves according to their “power and privilege.” They separated the eight-year-old children into oppressors and oppressed. [Link](#).
- A middle school in Springfield, Missouri, forced teachers to locate themselves on an “oppression matrix,” claiming that white heterosexual Protestant males are inherently oppressors and must atone for their “covert white supremacy.” [Link](#).

- A Philadelphia elementary school forced fifth-graders to celebrate “Black communism” and simulated a Black Power rally to “free Angela Davis” from prison. At this school, 87 percent of students will fail to achieve basic literacy by graduation. [Link](#).
- Buffalo Public Schools taught students that “all white people” perpetuate systemic racism and forced kindergarteners to watch a video of dead black children warning them about “racist police and state-sanctioned violence” who might kill them at any time. [Link](#).
- The Arizona Department of Education created an “equity” toolkit claiming that babies show the first signs of racism at three months old and that white children become full racists—“strongly biased in favor of whiteness”—by age five. [Link](#).
- The California Department of Education passed an “ethnic studies” curriculum that calls for the “decolonization” of American society and has students chant to the Aztec god of human sacrifice. The solution, according to one author, is “counter-genocide.” [Link](#).
- North Carolina’s largest school district launched a campaign against “whiteness in educational spaces”—and encouraged teachers to subvert families and push the ideology of “antiracism” directly onto students without parental consent. [Link](#).
- Santa Clara County Office of Education denounced the United States as a “parasitic system” based on the “invasion” of “white male settlers” and encouraged teachers to “cash in on kids’ inherent empathy” in order to recruit them into political activism. [Link](#).
- Portland Public Schools trained children to become race-conscious revolutionaries by teaching that racism “infects the very structure(s) of our society,” and telling students to immerse themselves in “revolution.” [Link](#).
- The principal of East Side Community School in New York sent white parents a “tool for action,” which tells them they must become “white traitors” and then advocate for full “white abolition.” [Link](#).
- Students at the elite United Nations International School launched an anonymous social media campaign denouncing their teachers as “racists” and “oppressors”—and school administrators immediately caved to their demands. [Link](#).

Critical race theory in government

- The Treasury Department told employees that “all white people” are racist and that children become racist by 3 months old. [Link](#).
- A Department of Education-funded conference advocated for “abolition” of American institutions and told whites they must “give up” their “wealth.” [Link](#).
- The National Credit Union Administration told employees America was founded on “white supremacy.” [Link](#).
- The Department of Homeland Security told its white employees that they have been “socialized into oppressor roles.” [Link](#).

- The CDC hosted a 13-week training program declaring that “racism is a public health crisis” and denounced the US as a nation of “White supremacist ideology.” [Link](#).
- The State Department, EPA, and VA pressured staff to denounce their “white privilege,” become “co-resistors” against “systemic racism,” and sign “equity pledges.” [Link](#).

Critical race theory in corporations

- The Walt Disney Corporation claimed that America was founded on “systemic racism,” encouraged employees to complete a “white privilege checklist,” and separated minorities into racially-segregated “affinity groups.” [Link](#).
- Lockheed Martin, the nation’s largest defense contractor, sent key executives on a mission to deconstruct their “white male privilege” and encouraged them to atone for their “white male privilege.” [Link](#).

POLLING DATA

This survey from Parents Defending Education shows that teaching many critical race theory principles is deeply unpopular with American families, including center-left and minority voters.

STATE LEGISLATION

The strongest state legislation prohibits state agencies and public schools from compelling employees and students to believe in the key principles of critical race theory, including race essentialism, collective guilt, neo-segregation, and racial superiority. This protects the individual’s right to conscience (First Amendment), right to equal protection under the law (Fourteenth Amendment), and right against racial discrimination (Civil Rights Act of 1964).

The State of Idaho has passed legislation that accomplishes these goals in a balanced manner and can serve as model legislation for other states.

LEGAL ACTION

Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen has released a letter outlining how critical race theory practices violate civil rights laws, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Following this legal reasoning, state attorneys general can investigate and stop critical race theory in the classroom under existing law.