



Critical Race Theory



Understanding Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) gained widespread attention following the global protests over George Floyd's murder in 2020. In the UK, MP Kemi Badenoch condemned CRT as “a dangerous trend” and asserted that the government opposed it entirely. Some evangelical circles viewed CRT as a neo-Marxist ideology, conflicting with Christian teachings. But what exactly is CRT?

Origins and Key Figures

CRT was developed by legal scholars seeking to examine racial inequalities within the American justice system. One of its pioneers, Derrick Bell, became the first Black tenured professor at Harvard Law School (1971) and later Dean at the University of Oregon (1989). He resigned from both institutions to protest unfair recruitment practices that excluded women of color. Bell used allegory and storytelling to interrogate racism in U.S. law and society.

Another significant contributor, Kimberlé Crenshaw, introduced intersectionality—a concept explaining how overlapping forms of discrimination (such as race and gender) shape individuals' experiences. Crenshaw found that women of color were less likely to have their cases pursued in the criminal justice system. Since its inception, intersectionality has influenced broader discussions on race, disability, and LGBTQ+ advocacy.



Core Principles of CRT

CRT scholars Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic outline six fundamental tenets of CRT:

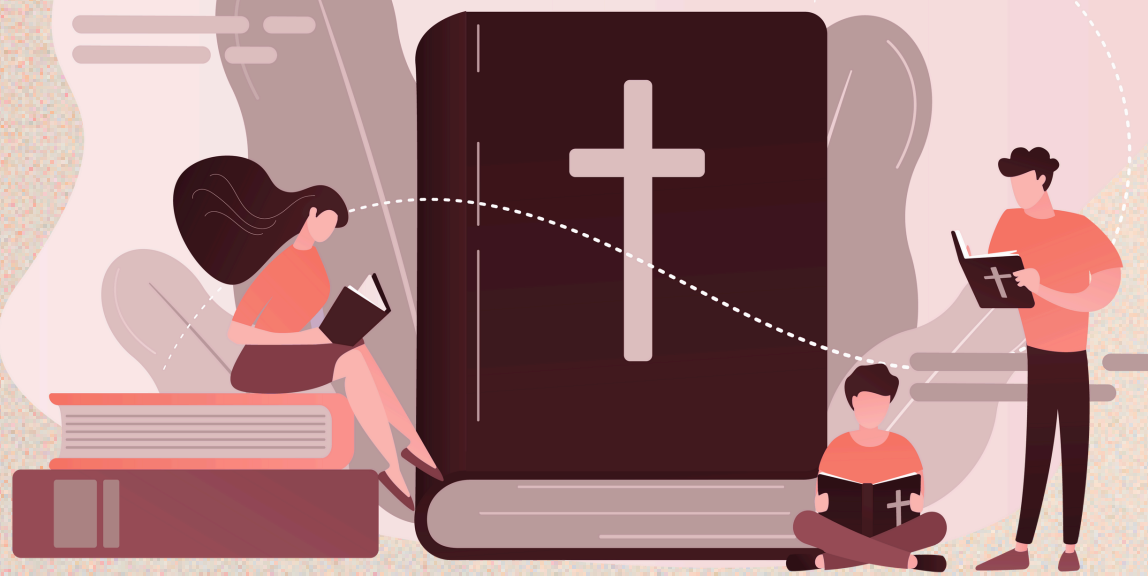
1. Racism is normal – Racism is deeply ingrained in Western society and operates as an ordinary function of life.
2. Race is socially constructed – Racial categories are social inventions upheld by societal power structures, rather than biological realities.
3. Differential racialization – Minority groups are racialized differently across time based on shifting political and economic needs.
4. Unique voice of color – Marginalized communities have distinct perspectives on race and oppression that those in majority groups may not recognize.
5. Interest convergence – The majority culture often supports racial justice only when it aligns with their own interests.
6. Racism is permanent – Some scholars argue that racism is deeply embedded in societal structures, requiring constant activism rather than assuming eventual eradication.



CRT and Activism

CRT is deeply tied to activism, stemming from the work of scholar-activists like Bell and Crenshaw. CRT critiques traditional civil rights approaches, focusing on transforming existing legal and social structures rather than advocating for gradual change.

Interest convergence, a particularly controversial tenet, suggests that majority groups (such as white individuals) only support racial justice when it benefits them. Bell illustrated this concept in his provocative fable “The Space Traders”, where the U.S. government trades its Black citizens to aliens in exchange for erasing national debt, improving climate conditions, and unlimited energy resources. Bell also argued that America’s desegregation of schools in 1954 was not purely about racial justice but a strategic move to improve its global image during the Cold War.



Biblical Engagement with CRT

CRT's emphasis on justice provides an opportunity for biblical discussion. The Old Testament prophets frequently condemned societal corruption, urging God's people to protect widows, orphans, and the poor (Micah 3). In the New Testament, Jesus—a son of immigrants, living under occupation, falsely accused, and executed—identifies with the oppressed. His death and resurrection address both personal and systemic sin, leading to true transformation.

CRT also highlights systemic injustice, a concept reflected throughout Scripture. Western-influenced cultures often emphasize personal salvation while neglecting the communal responsibility to address structural inequalities. The early church modeled this by selling possessions to care for widows and the marginalized (Acts).

However, CRT's pessimism regarding racial justice differs from the gospel's message of redemption and change. Interest convergence assumes that racial progress is always driven by self-interest rather than genuine transformation. Yet the gospel shows that true repentance leads to real change—both individually and within societal systems.



Practical Steps Forward

Christian apologist Sean McDowell encourages believers to engage critically:

"Read CRT for yourself. Read it charitably. Read it critically."

To engage meaningfully:

- Avoid echo chambers—research CRT’s original works alongside Christian critiques.
- Balance justice concerns with theological integrity—evaluate CRT’s arguments thoughtfully.
- Explore resources, such as Derrick Bell’s “The Space Traders”, Neil Shenvi & Pat Sawyer’s “Critical Dilemma”, and Healing the Divides by Jessamin Birdsall & Jason Roach.

Understanding CRT allows for informed, gospel-centered discussions on justice.



LIFE FOCUS
SOCIETY



About the Speaker

Clare Williams is the founder of Real Questions (a platform that explores the intersection of race and faith in the black British context) and an Associate Speaker and Tutor at the OCCA The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. Her work focuses on questions of race, justice, and culture. She is passionate about showing what the Christian message has to offer these sensitive subjects and issues.

Clare has a degree in English Language and Literature from Oxford University, and a Masters in Leadership (2012) and Culture, Diaspora and Ethnicity (2021) from the University of London. She also holds certificates in Theology from Wycliffe Hall, and in Apologetics from OCCA The Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. She is currently undertaking doctoral work at the University of Westminster in sociological research.



LIFE FOCUS
SOCIETY