

The Deeply Pessimistic Intellectual Roots of Black Lives Matter, 1619 Project, and Much Else in Woke America

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Critical race theory's foundational precept is the centrality and permanence in society of racism against blacks, rejecting the idea of significant racial progress. Pictured: The first tenured black professor of law at Harvard University, Derrick Bell Jr., seen here in an undated photo, is largely credited as the originator of critical race theory. Bell died in 2011 at age 80.

If much of the dire rhetoric behind America's moment of racial reckoning seems from an oppressive world of a half-century ago, that's because it comes from "critical race theory," a decades-old philosophy deeply skeptical about the possibility of racial progress.

It turns up in the best-selling book "White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism," in which readers are told that "white identity is inherently racist" and that "the white collective fundamentally hates blackness."

[The New York Times' historically revisionist 1619 Project](#), published last year and distributed to more than 3,500 K-12 classrooms, similarly instructs that "anti-black racism runs in the very DNA of this country."

In Durham, North Carolina, a racial task force last month [issued a 68-page report to city leaders](#) stating that all social structures were designed to subjugate blacks, to privilege "the health of white bodies," and "to indoctrinate all students with the internalized belief that the white race is superior."

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So-called equity teams of students and faculty at some high schools in North Carolina's capital region are reading a primer, "Critical Race Theory: An Introduction," which says African Americans aren't only subjugated through hate and terror, but also kept down through

supposedly white cultural mechanisms of individualism, objectivity, neutrality, meritocracy, and color blindness.

These are just a few of the examples of how contemporary culture is being shaped by critical race theory, a movement born in law schools in the 1970s, influenced by Marxists, French postmodernists, the Black Power cause, radical feminists, and other disaffected leftist scholars.

It quickly spread throughout the humanities and social sciences, shaping a generation of students who now hold positions of influence in academia, public school systems, corporate HR departments, publishing, the media, and, of course, Black Lives Matter—the latter prominent in current street protests against police abuses and racism.

Initially dismissed as an academic sideshow, critical race theory's assumptions and precepts are now espoused as self-evident, often without awareness that this uprising has a name, a history, a literature, and ambitions to advance ever-new theories of discrimination and demands for reparations.

The vocabulary and concepts of the theory have been disseminated through corporate diversity workshops, social media and mass media, higher education and secondary education, best-selling books, and local church discussion groups.

Even the conservative [Southern Baptist Convention declared last year](#) that evangelical theologians rely on critical race theory to understand American social dynamics.

Some of its ideas—on hate speech, white privilege, and implicit bias—are already widely accepted in education and in workplaces. Other concepts—the rejection of a colorblind society, standardized testing, and urban policing cultures—are making headway.

Meanwhile, new critical race theory ideas are in the pipeline to expand the boundaries of racism and render customs and practices accepted today as problematic in the future.

How to Explain the Ideology's Rise?

"I've always laid it at the doorstep of the millennials, who were by and large highly receptive to our message, and maybe, as well, [President Donald] Trump for the opposite reason—because he's so crude and awful," said University of Alabama law professor Richard Delgado, one of the founders of the theory and co-author, with his wife, Jean Stefancic, of "Critical Race Theory: An Introduction," the primer read by the North Carolina equity teams.

"Is it society that has come around to us?" Delgado, who identifies as Chicano, said in a phone interview. "Because the world is so terrible that they've hit upon us and our ways of describing it? Because it rings true?"

Angela Onwuachi-Willig, dean and professor at the Boston University Law School and the daughter of Nigerian immigrant parents, says the country is in the midst of a “generational shift” among students who have grown up in “pervasive segregation in their residential lives.” She said she is continually surprised by her students’ fluency in the argot of critical race theory.

“You’ve got this open generation that grew up exposed to this language in middle school, high school, and certainly in college,” said Onwuachi-Willig, who identifies as black and specializes in critical race theory, gender matters, race and law, and related issues. “It’s not called critical race theory. It’s just something you know.”

Critical race theory’s foundational precept is the centrality and permanence in society of racism against blacks, rejecting the idea of significant racial progress.

Moreover, critical race theory is an activist enterprise pragmatically focused on outcomes. It takes “systemic racism” as a given, with racism enmeshed into social institutions and social relations, so that all racial disparities—in life spans, incarceration rates, household wealth, and education levels—serve as proof that the system is rigged.

Thus, critical race theory is a renunciation of America’s hyper-competitive, technocratic, capitalistic society, whose lopsided economic outcomes are treated as natural and incontestable by society’s winners as was the divine right of kings in its own day.

Denounced as a Cult of Victimhood

Critical race theory has long been denounced as simplistic, dogmatic, fatalistic, and toxic—a cult of victimhood that embraces racial conflict as inevitable.

As black [Harvard University law professor Randall Kennedy wrote in an early critique in 1989](#), chief among critical race theory’s “baneful notions is the belief that race is destiny,” which leads adherents to play up their racial oppression as a coveted badge of moral authority.

A new book, “[Cynical Theories](#): How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody,” warns that critical race theory, along with similar theories promoting other marginalized identities, is a surefire formula for fomenting balkanization and social conflict.

“Critical race theory’s hallmark paranoid mindset, which assumes racism is everywhere, always, just waiting to be found, is extremely unlikely to be helpful or healthy for those who adopt it,” the book states. “Adherents actively search for hidden and overt racial offenses until they find them, and they allow of no alternative or mitigating explanations.”

“One could be easily forgiven ... for thinking that critical race theory sounds rather racist itself, in ascribing profound failures of morals and character to white people,” assert the co-authors,

Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, whose campaign against activist scholarship has [published sham research to expose the lax academic standards](#) of what they call “grievance studies.”

Still, the history of this idea shows that critical race theory, like Marxism and Freudianism before it, proved infinitely adaptable, supplying a novel perspective that led to provocative legal and historical research.

Stanford University civil rights historian Clayborne Carson, an African American, said critical race theory has left its mark on intellectual life, even if the theory calcifies into a pessimistic dead-end when taken too far.

“It’s helped us get beyond the time where a white male person in a privileged position defined the world for the rest of us,” said Carson, who was senior adviser for the public television series “Eyes on the Prize.”

“Any historical reality can be seen from different perspectives. That has led to some new insights,” he said.

Amid the Afterglow of the Civil Rights Movement

Critical race theory arose in the afterglow of the civil rights movement, when many white Americans were still congratulating themselves for the end of legal discrimination.

Radical scholars and activists were concerned that civil rights gains had stalled and warned of a looming backlash to dismantle affirmative action, halt integration, and fall back on old habits.

In [a landmark article in 1978](#), white legal scholar Alan Freeman laid out a framework of resistance, depicting the United States as a society of “victims” and “perpetrators,” where racist inequalities are glossed over as “matters of fate, having nothing do to with the problem of racial discrimination.”

Of this white-affirming worldview, Freeman declared: “It creates a class of ‘innocents,’ who need not feel any personal responsibility for the conditions associated with discrimination, and who therefore feel great resentment when called upon to bear any burdens in connection with remedying violations.”

Critical race theory was initially advanced through articles published in law journals, which serve as the Federalist Papers of the movement.

In these legal analyses, critical race theorists deconstruct the legacy of the Western Enlightenment—or what one scholar has called [“the falsity of the liberal promise”](#)—as a rationale developed to justify white domination of people of color by imposing European norms as objective and scientific.

The papers show key critical race theory concepts, such as [microaggressions](#) and [intersectionality](#), which started becoming commonplace in recent years, were fully developed by legal scholars in the 1990s.

The concept of white racial “privilege” as a legal concept was [already in use in the 1980s](#) and became popularized by a white academic working outside critical race theory: Wellesley College senior researcher Peggy McIntosh, whose “invisible knapsack,” initially published in 1988, lists 46 examples of unearned privileges favoring whites, such as being able to shop without being followed by a security guard and being able to “talk with my mouth full and not have people put this down to my color.”

Science Fiction and ‘Counter-Reality’

Even as they published in law journals, critical race theorists flouted the staid conventions of the legal establishment, and adopted counternarratives, fables, parables, and allegories—even science fiction—to create [what Delgado has called](#) “a kind of counter-reality,” reflecting the perspectives of the downtrodden.

The now-deceased black Harvard law professor [Derrick Bell Jr. wrote four books featuring a fictional character, Geneva Crenshaw](#), while Delgado invented his own alter-ego, Rodrigo, who was Geneva’s fictional half-brother.

In Bell’s most famous story, “[The Space Traders](#),” published in 1992, white Americans agree to trade black Americans to extraterrestrials in exchange for gold, new energy resources, and environmental cleansing materials.

These fictional counter-stories and revisionist histories challenge, displace, or mock the “pernicious narratives and beliefs” of the white majority, Delgado’s critical race theory primer explains. Just as importantly, readable stories with a moral wallop bring the theory to the masses.

“We use a number of different voices, but all recognize that the American social order is maintained and perpetuated by racial subordination,” Bell explained in 1995.

The budding movement held its first conference in 1989 at a convent in Wisconsin, attended by 24 activist scholars. The “crits,” as they called themselves, combined insurgent scholarship with 1960s-style activism, quickly picking up adherents. In 1990, [students at more than 40 law schools boycotted classes](#) to protest the underrepresentation of minorities on faculty.

In critical race theory, racism is not a local variant of the ancient practices of caste or slavery, but something new in the world that was born with European imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, and rationalism.

Racism is understood not as a smattering of intentional acts of bigotry, but as an entire system that runs on autopilot and operates imperceptibly to whites who are punch-drunk on the myths of colorblindness and individual achievement.

“People don’t exist solely as individuals,” said Juan F. Perea, a U.S.-born Latino and a professor of law and social justice at Loyola University Chicago. “We certainly have individual characteristics, but many of our outcomes are heavily influenced by how we’re viewed and treated because of our group membership—such as race, such as sex.”

A Shape-Shifting Phenomenon

According to critical race theory, racism is a constantly shape-shifting phenomenon, morphing from slavery to Jim Crow to redlining to the schools-to-prison pipeline to “I Can’t Breathe.”

The landmarks along this moral timeline include [the New Deal and GI Bill](#), federal social programs offering financial assistance for college tuition and home purchases that helped create the modern American middle class, but which are characterized by race scholars as being structured to largely bypass black Americans.

In the social justice paradigm, the protean nature of racism has over time produced the black-white wealth gap, resulting in [a 10-to-1 disparity in average household net worth](#), according to the Brookings Institution.

That sense of unchanging gloom is reflected in rock star diversity trainer Robin DiAngelo’s assertion in “White Fragility,” her 2018 manifesto: “In some ways, racism’s adaptations over time are more sinister than concrete rules such as Jim Crow.”

Delgado not only subscribes to this view, but is one of its founders, espousing “the law of racial thermodynamics—that racism can neither be created nor destroyed.”

Just as the critical race theory movement was getting under way, the war on drugs was in full swing, leading to the expansion of a privately run prison industry and the militarization of local police departments.

The nation’s prison population ultimately swelled from some 300,000 to more than 2 million, handing critical race theorists a powerful narrative of a supposedly “post-racial” America’s physical and spiritual destruction of an entire generation of African American males.

Many critical race theory scholars consider the detention and deportation of illegal immigrants from Mexico and Central America as part of the same phenomenon.

The Critics of Critical Race Theory

The early criticisms of critical race theory were imbued with a sense of shock and awe at the critics’ contempt for the legal system and their radical rhetoric.

In the 1990s, federal Judge Richard Posner reviewed "[Beyond All Reason](#)," the first book-length critique of critical race theory, concluding that it's not unusual for an intellectual movement to have a lunatic fringe, but noted that "[radical legal egalitarianism is distinguished by having a rational fringe and a lunatic core.](#)"

An early alarm that critical race theory would see the First Amendment and the rule of law itself as tools of capitalist oppression was sounded by Manhattan Institute scholar Heather Mac Donald in 1995.

"Outside the academy, much of critical race and feminist legal scholarship is unlikely to influence policy," [Mac Donald concluded](#). "Critical race theory and feminist jurisprudence thrive in the academic hothouse where they need never confront practical reality."

Today's critics treat critical race theory as agitprop advancing totalitarianism in the guise of research and scholarship. As blatant racism becomes a thing of the past, they contend, leftists are left grasping for flimsy evidence, either by expanding the definition of racism or by making outrageous statements, to keep up their narrative of oppression.

"Their philosophy is in some ways a form of psychosis, because it's not wedded to the real world," said Jason Hill, a professor of philosophy at DePaul University and author of "We Have Overcome: An Immigrant's Letter to the American People."

"They want to re-create a freaking drama that doesn't exist," said Hill, a black Jamaican immigrant who has taught critical race theory and considers himself an independent conservative. "They have to reenact a medieval morality play and cast a set of demonic characters versus iconic innocent characters, and replay the whole thing over and over again."

Hill and other critics warn that critical race theory represents a dangerous return to age-old tribal hatreds that are rationalized by self-serving us-versus-them mythologies of moral purity and intellectual superiority.

Where critical race theorists depict the Western Enlightenment as the ultimate oppression narrative, critical race theory's foes uphold Western values as humanity's best, if imperfect, hope for progress.

"What bothers me about the talk of white privilege is that it's used as a kind of leverage to induce shame and guilt in white people," Hill said. "It's really a form of white annihilation. It's really saying to white people: 'By virtue of your whiteness, you need to die a certain kind of social death for me to prosper.'"

White Progressives and the Drive for Race-Neutrality

Without understanding critical race theory's assault on liberalism, one might miss the literal significance of the author's claim in "White Fragility" that "white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color."

Or the claim in "How to Be an Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi, the director of Boston University's Center for Antiracist Research: "The most threatening racist movement is not the alt right's unlikely drive for a White ethnostate, but the regular American's drive for a 'race-neutral' one."

Such arguments are no mere rhetorical flourishes. They are meant as indictments of the cultural software running in the background of the American way of life.

"Critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law," states Delgado's critical race theory book, originally published in 2001, updated in 2017, and now in its third edition, with sales approaching 100,000.

"Think how that system applauds affording everyone equality of opportunity, but resists programs that assure equality of results, such as affirmative action at an elite college or university, or efforts to equalize public school funding among districts in a region."

Many of critical race theory's opponents are traditional liberals dismayed that so many progressives are embracing critical race theory as though it were an improved model of liberalism, not its avowed enemy.

Some critical race theorists are ready to write off Western Enlightenment traditions for non-white people.

"It may be redeemable for folks who live in Western Europe," said David Stovall, professor of black studies and criminology, law, and justice at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and author of the 2016 book "Born Out of Struggle: Critical Race Theory, School Creation, and the Politics of Interruption."

"But in the United States, I think we have to continue to ask that question because in many ways it has proven itself to be irredeemable," said Stovall, who identifies as black and is among those who are concerned the current critical race theory wave may be mere "window dressing" and virtue signaling that will not lead to radical changes in American society.

One change Stovall would like to see is the elimination of standardized testing and grading, practices targeted by some critical race theorists as an example of an "objective" methodology used to maintain a permanent black and Latino underclass.

"It's a pseudo-science," Stovall said. "Standardized testing is an extension of eugenics."

A Clearinghouse for Interrelated Concepts

No discussion of critical race theory makes sense without understanding that it is not a single idea, but a clearinghouse for more than a dozen interrelated concepts, some devised by critical race theorists, others adopted and incorporated into critical race theory.

Key to understanding critical race theory is grasping the difference between equity, the social justice goal of developing policy to produce equal outcomes, as opposed to equality, the scorned liberal ideal of equal rules and procedures.

Microaggressions are smaller racist acts or snubs that go unnoticed or dismissed by whites but have the cumulative effect of death by a thousand pinpricks. In an early use of the word, in 1989, a critical race theory scholar posited that [the American legal system itself functions as a microaggression](#) against black self-esteem.

Another key concept, intersectionality, was [introduced by critical race theory scholar and feminist Kimberle Williams Crenshaw](#) in 1989 to describe oppression that's specific to a black woman, but not experienced by either black men or by white women.

[Crenshaw contended](#) that the absence of a legal category—that is, keeping a form of oppression unnamed—means that “black women are theoretically erased.”

Thus, naming an oppression dovetails with the social justice emphasis on language—or “discourse”—as a tool of oppression and a strategy of liberation.

Intersectionality has since taken off as a description of a social web of interlocking oppressions—from gender to sexual orientation to disability—leading another scholar to theorize about American society as a “[matrix of domination](#).”

Critical race theory also emphasizes “the special voice of color” and the “subjective lived experience” of people of color as the most reliable and truthful sources for what it's like to live under white supremacy.

When applied to journalism, literature, and other endeavors, critical race theory endorses historical revisionism to relate stories from the perspective of the victims and to “de-center” the perspective of the oppressor.

Critical race theorists were early advocates for reparation payments as a way of compensating black people for the wealth they were deprived of over the centuries.

The critics floated a variety of other ideas, such as “[cumulative voting](#),” in which each voter is allowed as many votes as there are candidates and may give all votes to one candidate. The concept was proposed in the mid-1990s by Lani Guinier, now a Harvard law professor, as a way of boosting black electoral leverage.

Georgetown University law professor Paul Butler, a former federal prosecutor, advocated for black juries to ignore prosecutorial evidence and acquit black defendants charged with nonviolent crimes.

“It is the moral responsibility of black jurors to emancipate some guilty black outlaws,” [Butler wrote in the Yale Law Journal in 1995](#), saying that the criminal justice system is an instrument of white supremacy.

Successful Campaigns to Ban Hate Speech

Among critical race theory’s triumphs has been the campaign to ban hate speech. Critical race theorists began asserting that racial slurs have serious psychological and societal consequences, and that such speech should be exempted from First Amendment protections, and instead treated similarly to libel or threats.

Today, hate speech is prohibited at more than 200 universities, Delgado said, and generally considered taboo in workplaces, to the extent that some courts have deemed hate speech a form of a hostile work environment.

“Thirty years ago, one could reply, ‘So what,’ ‘laugh it off,’ ‘talk back,’ or some other cliched response. Today that’s impossible,” Delgado said. “If someone is guilty of hate speech, they almost immediately apologize when it’s called to their attention. The social norm against hate speech is pretty firmly established.”

The decision earlier this year by [the Board of Regents of the University of California](#) to phase out the SAT as racist and discriminatory is another example of how critical race theory’s critique of objectivity has gained traction, its proponents say.

By some counts, [more than 1,000 colleges and universities](#) have dropped or disregard the SAT and ACT, even though defenders say that when used properly, standardized tests benefit disadvantaged students.

Contrary to the critical race theory narrative of relentless racism, opinion polls tell a different story. In 2015, [the Gallup organization reported](#) that more than 90% of Americans would support a black or female presidential candidate, compared with barely half in 1960.

[Approval rates for racial intermarriage](#) soared to 87% in 2013, compared with just 4% in 1958. And [a 2019 survey](#) found that white liberals “expressed a preference for other racial and ethnic communities above their own,” an unprecedented display of wokeness.

Critical race theory doesn’t put much stock in this sort of progress. Matthew Hughey, a University of Connecticut professor of sociology, who has written extensively on race, said changing attitudes among whites are indeed real and opening a yawning gap between thought

and practice that scholars call the “principle-policy gap”—a discrepancy a layperson might understand as hypocrisy.

“If you talk to a lot of white people today, the thing white people are most afraid of is being called a racist,” said Hughey, who is white. “They are not afraid of living in a segregated neighborhood, sending their child to a segregated school, or doing the thing that exacerbates racism, but being called the thing.”

Unending Search for New Evidence of Racism

Wilfred Reilly, a critical race theory critic who is black and teaches political science at the historically black Kentucky State University, said the income gap between blacks and whites nearly disappears when adjusted for such variables as [age](#), region, education level, and home life.

Furthermore, the single-bullet theory of systemic racism falls apart because many non-white ethnic groups [outperform whites](#) economically, said Reilly, who is author of “Hate Crime Hoax: How the Left Is Selling a Fake Race War.”

Reilly said residual racism is a factor in American society, but only one of many factors, not the sole or biggest one determining a person’s fate.

Proponents of critical race theory are perpetually searching for new evidence of racism that is hidden in plain sight. One example Delgado mentioned as holding promise for future adoption is [a theory of discrimination developed in 2000](#) by UCLA law professor Devon Carbado and Mitu Gulati, now at Duke University.

They contend that the exhausting machinations required of people of color to overcome racial stereotypes and preempt negative assumptions constitute a kind of employment discrimination in itself.

The theory here is that concern about others’ potential racism essentially requires black people to do more work than whites—and that merely working in the presence of white people is a type of oppression.

“We argue that both the nature of the work and the pressure to do it, the ‘working identity’ phenomenon, is a form of employment discrimination,” their paper states. “Heretofore, antidiscrimination law has not identified, let alone addressed, this problem.”

In 2001, [Delgado suggested a college admissions policy](#) that would not only reward disadvantaged applicants of color with bonus points, but would also penalize privileged white applicants, by reducing their standardized scores to account for their unearned social advantages.

“We’re constantly looking for new topics and issues and problems to examine and critique,” Delgado said. “So, the work we’re doing now will be second nature, part of what everyone knows in 20 or 30 years.”



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COMMENTS:

“Unending Search for New Evidence of Racism”. Give me an effin break. This is evidence that the malcontent BS will never end. That’s what liberalism is all about, NEVER BEING SATISFIED. Liberals aren’t happy until EVERYONE is unhappy! A mental disorder for sure.

It's called Critical Lower The Bar theory.

The left will never be happy until their ideology is systemic....and even then, they won't be happy.

More absurd nonsense. First, there are no liberals left, at least in the democrat party. A liberal person is tolerant of the views of others, and they support the First Amendment. Leftist democrats are totally intolerant of any views which are different than theirs, and seek ways to "cancel" anyone who does not go along with everything they support.

As far as seeking "progress, change and improvement" leftists apply these labels to the things that they want. The words do not accurately describe most of the things that they stand for, they are just a ploy to get the support of the ignorant.

The "Affordable Care Act" (Obamacare) is just one example of this ploy by leftists. They passed this massive intrusion of the health insurance and health care system by claiming that it was "progress, change and improvement". In actuality it made health insurance much more costly and made subscribers pay extremely high deductibles before they received any benefits.