A BIBLICAL VIEW ON
CRITICAL RACE THEORY

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CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical race theory has been in the news. What is it, and why are so many people either defending it or opposing it? How is it being introduced in the schools, businesses, and the government?

Critical race theory is a descendent of a philosophical tradition known as critical theory. It began at the Univer-

sity of Frankfurt's Institute for Social Research, that came to be known as the "Frankfurt School." The Frankfurt scholars fled to Columbia University's Teachers College in New York in 1934 to escape the Nazis.

Critical theory traces all social injustice to inequities in power that are based unfairly on class, race, gender, or sexual orientation. In classical Marxism, the focus was on class with the assumption that the working class would rise up against the capitalist oppressors. That never really happened the way Karl Marx predicted. Instead, these cultural Marxists proposed a conflict that would develop based on race and some of the other factors just mentioned.

Assumptions and Euphemisms

Critical race theory is based on several assumptions. First, there is no absolute truth. There are only compet-

ing narratives. Second, the economy is a zero-sum game. The gain of one race is at the expense of another race. Third, individuals are either an oppressor or a victim. Fourth, America is systemically racist and must be dismantled.

There is a great deal of rhetoric and euphemisms that are deployed by practitioners of critical race theory. This includes such words and phrases as: "equity" and "social justice" and "diversity and inclusion" and "culturally responsive teaching." A word like equity might seem like a synonym for equality, but that is not the case. Proponents use the concept of equity to argue for suspending private property rights (UCLA professor Cheryl Harris) and for setting up a federal Department of Antiracism (Boston University professor Ibram X. Kendi) that would have power to nullify, veto, or abolish any law that does not provide racial equity.

Because critical race theory has its roots in cultural Marxism, proponents define people based on their group and practice identity politics. They also look at the intersection of victim groups and thus talk about intersectionality.

You are either in power or out of power. If you are in power, you are automatically discredited. If you are underprivileged, you are immune from criticism. This also means that the claims of critical race theory are unfalsifiable. It becomes impervious to counter-evidence and thus cannot be rationally defended.

This is no small issue because the underprivileged can make demands, but do not need to make rational arguments. The assumption is that the whole system (including facts, counter- arguments, and even basic rationality) is rigged against the oppressed. This is why you often hear proponents

of critical race theory making statements without appealing to evidence and why they reject anyone trying to present evidence that might dispute their dogmatic statements.

In a recent article by James Lindsay, he argues that "For Racial Healing, Reject Critical Race Theory." He starts with a thought experiment that shows how unpractical and confusing this theory becomes in everyday life.

He says we should imagine we own a small shop (perhaps a tailor shop) where you have to assist each customer individually. You are the sole proprietor and can only serve one customer at a time. Now imagine two people enter your store at exactly the same time. One is white, and the other is black. Which customer do you help first?

If you choose to serve the black person first, critical race theory would

argue that you did so because you don't trust the black person to be in your shop unattended while you help the other customer. That means you are acting according to racist stereotypes and chose poorly.

If you choose to serve the white person instead, then you are also demonstrating your racist bias. Choosing to help the white person shows that you favor white people and consider them first-class citizens. Once again, you have chosen poorly.

Perhaps you can see the dilemma created by the philosophy of critical race theory. It is a classic "heads I win, tails you lose." There is no right choice in this example. No matter what you do, you will always be wrong and thus be condemned as being racist. This illustration provides one more reason why critical race theory will not promote racial healing.

Into the Schools and Government

How is critical race theory making its way into the schools? Often it is introduced by activists in the local school district. But sometimes it even comes from government action.

Stanley Kurtz has been warning that the Civics Secures Democracy Act (being considered by Congress) could be used by activists and educators to promote critical race theory. The Department of Education proposed a regulation that directs grant money to prioritize applications that "support the development of culturally responsive teaching and learning." As we have seen, phrases like "equity" and "culturally responsive" are key buzzwords for critical race theory.

Christopher Rufo has been documenting how critical race theory is already arriving in the schools. A California elementary school forced

first-graders to deconstruct their racial and sexual identities, and then rank themselves according to their power and privilege. A middle school in Missouri forced teachers to locate themselves on an "oppression matrix," based on the idea that white, Christian males were members of an oppressor class. Although he is just one investigative journalist, he has already put together a database of more than 1,000 stories.

He has also documented how critical race theory made its way into government. The FBI has been holding workshops on intersectionality. The Department of Homeland Security was telling white employees that they have been "socialized into oppressor roles." That is why President Donald Trump issued an executive order banning critical race theory training. President Joe Biden rescinded that order on his first day in office.

Speaking out against critical race theory can be costly. Until recently, Lt. Col. Matthew Lohmeier served in the newly created Space Force. He was relieved from his post because he wrote a book denouncing critical race theory and Marxism in the US military. He said it wasn't his intent to engage in partisan politics. But he wrote the book because of the Marxist ideology that he saw being taught.

A Liberal Critique

Some of the criticism of critical race theory has been coming from people who would not be described as religious conservatives. Andrew Sullivan is one of these commentators sounding a warning that this perspective is "Removing the Bedrock of Liberalism."

He acknowledges that even trying to accurately define critical race theory is difficult because of the "sheer

volume of jargon words" that may be intended to "sow confusion." He also asks himself through his commentary whether he is accurately portraying the theory and concludes that he is not exaggerating its attack on liberal modernity. Proponents of Critical Race Theory admit that they question the very foundations of liberal society.

One example can be found in the book, *Understanding Critical Race Theory*. It was written four years ago and is hardly the most controversial book on the subject. That book explains that "critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law."

He also notes that critical race theory denies any claim to truth since "claims to truth are merely claims to power." Secular liberals and Christians

may disagree about many things, but at least they agree that truth exists and can be objectively discerned.

He also critiques the idea that nothing has changed. In other words, "slavery, segregation, mass incarceration are just different words for the same experience of oppression." He adds that critical race theory can also be defined by what it is not. "It is not an open-ended inquiry into buried history."

He also explains that critical race theory is the cuckoo in the academic nest. It used to be one school of thought. Over time, though, it has thrown out its competitors and does not allow open debate.

Response to the Criticism

Educators and parents who criticize critical race theory will quickly encounter push-back and accusations. These usually come in different forms.

One reaction from proponents is that anyone criticizing critical race theory is ignorant and doesn't understand it. A Texas state board of education member wrote that critics "have no idea what critical race theory is, what it does, who the founders are. They've never read a book, much less a paragraph on it." From there she goes on to use language inappropriate for an intelligent discussion.

Many commentators have even begun to argue that critical race theory has become the latest conservative "boogeyman." They believe right-wing politics is out of ideas (not true) and thus needs an enemy to attack. Many of the people speaking out are familiar with critical race theory and understand its potential for dividing America.

In several cases, parents have been able to find the syllabus for school courses and put them online.

They find that the goal is to "develop awareness about social justice and diversity issues" and learn about "the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and sexuality." Required textbooks usually include Ibram X. Kendi's *How to be an Antiracist* and Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*. Instead, we are being told (as one commentator put it) to "pay no attention to the curriculum behind the curtain."

Another reaction is to suggest that anyone opposing critical race theory wants to whitewash the past sins of America and perpetuate systemic racism in the future. One commentator assumed that critics didn't want to talk about racial disparities because they want to normalize the behavior and allow current patterns of behavior to continue. We should talk about slavery and America's racist past. But that doesn't mean we have to accept the idea that this country is more racist

today and riven with systemic racism in every institution.

Professor John McWhorter believes we should "assume that when politicos and parents decry critical race theory, what they refer to is the idea of oppression and white perfidy treated as the main meal of an entire school's curriculum." He adds that young children should not be taught they are guilty if white and oppressed if black. And they should not be taught that "the American story is mainly (note I write mainly rather than only, but mainly is just as awful here) one of oppression and racism."

A third reaction is to assure us that critical race theory is merely a philosophical tool and does not pose any threat to the social and political structures. That is not true. As one commentator put it, "No longer simply an academic matter, critical race theory has become a tool of political power."

It is moving through our public institutions and "driving the vast machinery of the state and society."

One of the standard sources (Understanding Critical Race Theory) mentioned earlier "questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law." It then goes on to argue that "radical measures are in order" because society is so racist. When it was written, the authors may not have meant "radical" to involve riots, protests, and burning cities. But we have seen the natural result of arguing that America is systemically racist, full of white privilege, and in need of a social revolution to overturn the existing order.

While we can applaud the boldness of some, there is still a great deal of fear keeping many Americans from speaking out. A recent Gallup poll

found that 77 percent of conservatives are afraid to share their political beliefs publicly. They rightly fear they will lose their jobs or get mobbed by social media. So they remain quiet.

Biblical Perspective

One of the foundational principles of critical race theory (along with postmodernism and other modern philosophical traditions) is a complete rejection of absolute truth. The Bible teaches that truth exists and can be discerned (Proverbs 30:5, John 8:32, 2 Timothy 3:16).

We should acknowledge that different groups of people might perceive Scripture differently, but that does not mean that one race has special access to biblical truth. The argument that our race (e.g., "whiteness") colors our interpretation suggests that we can all learn from each other in the body of Christ. But the real impedi-

ment to proper biblical interpretation is our sin (John 3:19-20). Paul teaches (1 Corinthians 2) that spiritual truth can best be discovered through the revelatory power of the Holy Spirit.

The proponents of critical race theory often reject rational arguments that contradict their dogma statements about race and society. By contrast, the Bible emphasizes the mind and rational discussion. Paul calls for Christians to "destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God" because we are to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). When a secular philosophy is being promoted in society, it is our responsibility to provide an honest critique of it. Our goal should be to think biblically and to "take every thought captive."

Critical race theory also creates division between races that is con-

trary to Scripture. Paul addressed the divisions in his day that could have created division within the church. He explains how Christ has pulled down the wall of division between Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14). He went further and taught that there is "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). There should be unity for believers and not division.

Proponents of critical race theory also propose a type of "guilt" on anyone who is identified as an oppressor merely because of their racial background. And people of this race will never really be forgiven because they will always be part of that race. By contrast, the Bible teaches that we are guilty because we are sinful (Romans 3:23, 6:23) not because of our racial status. Also, we cannot earn salvation by good works because salvation is

a gift of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are redeemed through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22-24).

Additional Resources

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