

Critical Race Theory: What is it and what have you heard?

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The United States is currently very divided. This has become a cliché statement, but it is not wrong. Almost every political issue has two very polarizing sides with passionate opinions. Critical Race Theory or CRT for short has been at the forefront of the political battleground for the last year. School board meetings have turned into war zones all over the country. The news constantly has a story regarding it; so, what is CRT? Critics and those opposed to CRT would claim that it is a method in which to make white students feel bad for being white. They also would argue that it is inherently un-American and used to purposefully divide the populace. Opponents to CRT are trying to ban it from the curriculum in schools across the nation. Most Americans will have an opinion on whether CRT should be taught in schools; however, many do not have an accurate understanding of the theory. So, then what is critical race theory and is the backlash against it justified? This paper will help explain the basic premise of CRT and the myths thrown around when referring to it. After diving into the critics' point of view, the history of the theory, and debunking myths, it will be clear that CRT is not harmful and should be taught in our schools.

As of right now there is much debate as to what critical race theory is and what it means. CRT is a framework that states that race is a social construct and that institutions in the United States have racism embedded in them. Republican lawmakers have been adamant about banning and removing talks of CRT from schools and they have their own reasons as to why it should be rid of. Many who favor removing CRT advocate that it divides the nation into oppressors and oppressed. They also have concerns of white children being made to feel ashamed of their race. A substantial portion of republican voters feel as though CRT is a negative for American society.

Staff writer for *The Hill*, Dominik Mastrangelo (2021) in his article “Majority of Republicans thinks critical race theory negatively affects society: poll” outlines the division between Democrats and Republicans on the issue of CRT. Fifty-four percent of those who identified as republican claimed that critical race theory would be negative for society compared to the Democrats at around thirteen percent. This shows how large the gap is for those who are in favor of CRT and those who are against it. Even more Republicans were opposed to critical race theory being taught in K-12 schools. Around sixty-three percent of individuals who are republican are against CRT being taught in K-12 curriculum (Mastrangelo,2021). Yet again the divide is large and there are major opposing ideas in the aspect of CRT. Critics argue that CRT should be outright banned to protect children. Books and mentioning racial topics have come under scrutiny. Books are being banned and Republicans are trying to censor these topics. The STOP WOKE ACT in Florida shows how far the right is going to fight CRT and issues of race. Nine states have passed legislation banning critical race theory from being taught in schools (Ray,2021). These examples of legislation against CRT show how opposed Republicans are to the idea of critical race theory.

So now that it has been outlined that CRT is polarizing what is it? The current understanding of critical race theory seems to be all over the place when it comes to the general public. The origins of critical race theory go back to about the 1960s and 1970s (Encyclopædia Britannica n.d, 2022). It would be officially organized in 1989 into what it is today. The origins of CRT draw from the critical legal studies movement or CLS. Critical legal studies were a framework that made the effort to investigate how the legal institutions of the United States favored the wealthy population versus those who were in poverty and or marginalized people. In 1989 this would be expanded on and turned into the topic of discussion for this paper. Critical

race theory as it currently stands is a framework in which one looks at how racism is entrenched in American institutions. The framework looks at how race is a social construct and how people of color suffer as a result of the racist institutions. It argues that racism is something that everyone does at a potentially unconscious level. This meaning that those who do not make the effort of even consciously think about racism may in fact be perpetrating it (Encyclopædia Britannica n.d, 2022). This means that even though laws that are inherently racist, like those of Jim Crow, are gone the system is still used against marginalized individuals. An example provided is strategies like redlining that are used to harm people of color, usually Black Americans (Sawchuk, 2021). So, when looking at what critical race theory actually entails, it seems to be extreme and even odd that so many are against it. The framework is not implying that all white people are bad and that every white person is an oppressor like critics propose. And as it currently stands it is not even being taught in this regard in k-12 schools. This tends to be taught at higher level education like colleges, meaning that the speaking points of children indoctrination are false.

Critical race theory is not something that should be feared and is misunderstood at a fundamental level. When looking into the opinions of those against it I get confused as to where they draw their conclusions. Those in power seem to be spreading a false narrative in an effort to keep their supporters fearful of the idea. Individuals like Senator Josh Hawley show this when making claims like this, “The advocates of critical theory tell us we have to dismantle our culture, our history, our families, our Jewish and Christian heritage and beliefs because they’re all oppressive (Hawley, 2021)”. Hyperbolic claims such as this help to instill fear and a misunderstanding of the topic at hand. Prudence Carter, a professor at U.C. Berkley, makes the statement that politicians are using the name of critical race theory as a strawman (Carter, 2021,

PBS News hour,2021). Again, critical race theory is not something that should be feared. It does not paint all white individuals as oppressors and due to these claims academics are confused as to where these statements come from (Ray, 2021). School board meetings across that country have been debating the inclusion of CRT in the curriculum of k-12 schools. As it stands right now, critical race theory is not taught in its entirety in schools (ABC Action News, 2021). What advocates for critical race theory propose is that educators teach students about racism and its history in the United States (ABC Action News, 2021). No one is trying to teach white children that they are bad; they are trying to teach children that there has been racism in this nation and that people are not always treated the same. When racism is passed on it is passed on through the household. By educating children to be anti-racist one can hope for racist attitudes to diminish.

As it currently stands, I believe critical race theory to be a positive for this nation. What needs to be done is education into what CRT is and how it is taught currently. The states that have banned CRT don't even refer to critical race theory by name in their legislation. What is occurring is the censorship of issues that are fundamental to this nation. Critical race theory investigates how institutions affect race and how to fix it to provide true equality (Groves Price, 2022). Critics want to use the colorblind approach, however, that is not realistic. There are differences in the way people look and people get treated differently as a result of that. By ignoring race and the grievances and struggle of those who are victims of the system no positive change can occur. By working together and working to dismantle systems that disproportionately harm people of color, our nation can hopefully one day truly provide liberty and justice for all.

Critical race theory is a framework that advocates that race is a social construct and that racism is entrenched in the institutions of the United States. Critics against critical race theory argue that it is harmful for society and harmful to teach. They believe that CRT paints all white

people as oppressors and all minorities as the oppressed. They are working to ban it from schools, ban speaking points and books that relate to it, and topics of race. Advocates for critical race theory say that it is important to teach that there is racism in this country. Critical race theory is not taught in k-12 schools and is currently one of the biggest and most controversial topics for debate. By having an accurate understanding of CRT, I believe this controversy can be mitigated. It is important to teach the full history of this nation, meaning the good and the bad. By acknowledging that racism is still around and is found in important institutions efforts to bring true equality to all individuals regardless of race can hopefully be achieved. A nation in which we truly can grant liberty and justice for all.

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