



Christianity and “Wokeness”: Are They Compatible?

Dr. Neil Shenvi

6/17/21

This talk is not about Trump



This talk is not about Trump



This talk is not about Trump



This talk is not about Trump

This talk is not about Trump

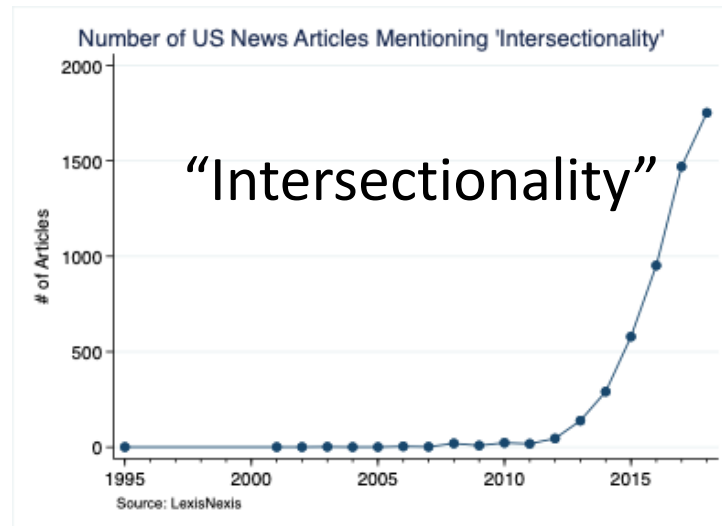
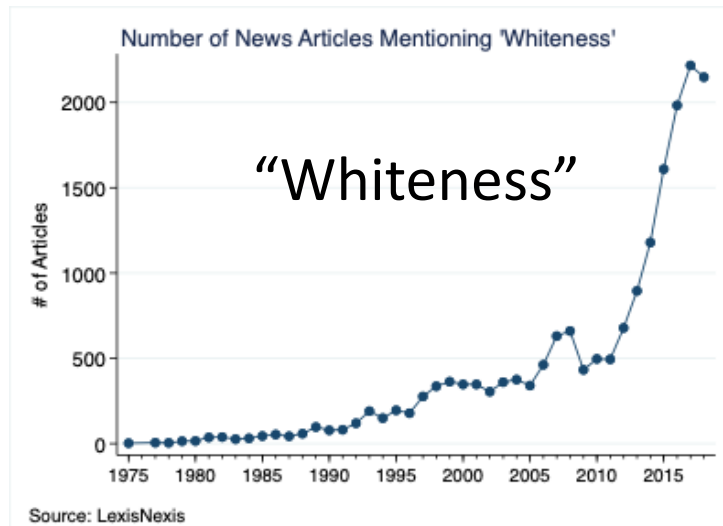
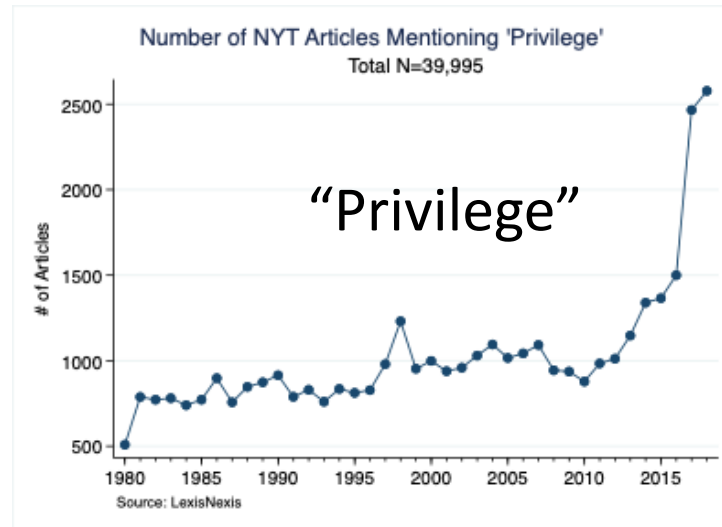
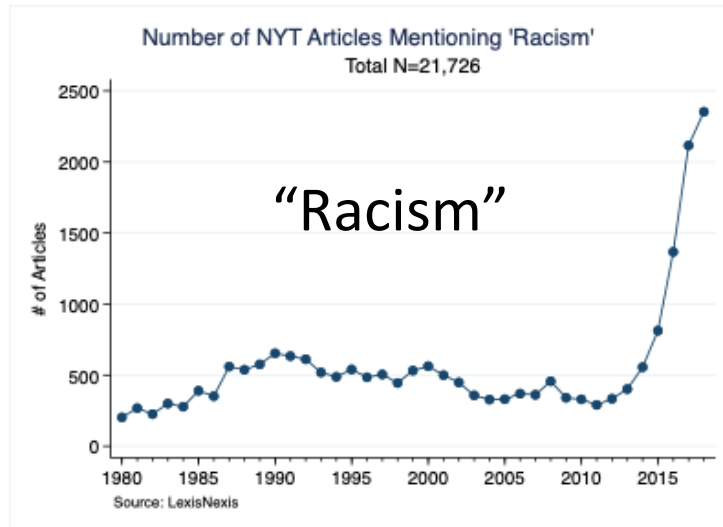
This talk is not about Trump

This talk is not about Trump

This talk is not about Trump

This talk is not about Trump

NYTimes word usage




Smithsonian NMAAHC

"Whiteness and white racialized identity refer to the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups of are compared."

TALKING ABOUT RACE | NMAAHC

ASPECTS & ASSUMPTIONS OF WHITENESS & WHITE CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

White dominant culture, or **whiteness**, refers to the ways white people and their traditions, attitudes and ways of life have been normalized over time and are now considered standard practices in the United States. And since white people still hold most of the institutional power in America, we have all internalized some aspects of white culture — including people of color.




Rugged Individualism

- The individual is the primary unit
- Self-reliance
- Independence & autonomy highly valued + rewarded
- Individuals assumed to be in control of their environment, "You get what you deserve"

Family Structure

- The nuclear family: father, mother, 2.3 children is the ideal social unit
- Husband is breadwinner and head of household
- Wife is homemaker and subordinate to the husband
- Children should have own rooms, be independent



Emphasis on Scientific Method

- Objective, rational linear thinking
- Cause and effect relationships
- Quantitative emphasis

Black Lives Matter

“We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence...

We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual (unless s/he or they disclose otherwise).”



Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?

Why should we care?

●●●○○ Sprint LTE 9:11 AM 75%
< Messages Pretend Texts Details

Christians should care about social justice!!!

Yeah, that seems reasonable

Beacuse the gospel is about caring for the poor

Wait, what do you mean

Does it really matter whether Jesus is God anyway?

...

●●●○○ Sprint LTE 8:57 AM 75%
< Messages Pretend Texts Details

Sexism is a sin. Women are made in God's image

absolutely!

The church needs to stop oppressing women!

in what way?

SMASH THE PATRIARCHY! WICCA FOR ALL!

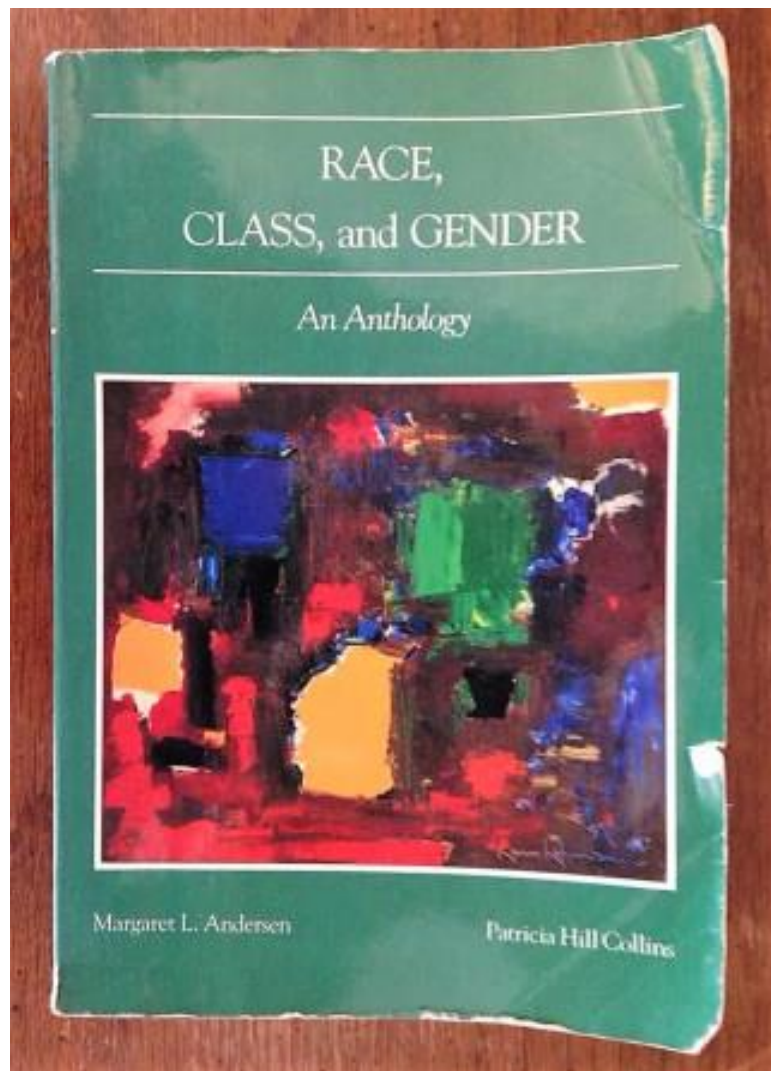
I'm must be missing something

Warning: fake texts. For pedagogical use only

📷 iFakeTextMessage.com 🎤

📷 iFakeTextMessage.com 🎤

Why should we care?



Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?

The Taxonomy of Critical Theory

“critical theory” = critical social theories

Neo-Marxism

**CULTURAL
STUDIES**

**Queer
Theory**

**CRITICAL
PEDAGOGY**

“Critical Theory”
= Frankfurt School



feminism

**GENDER
STUDIES**

**intro to
critical
race
theory**

Critical theory resists essentialism (it is hard to define!)

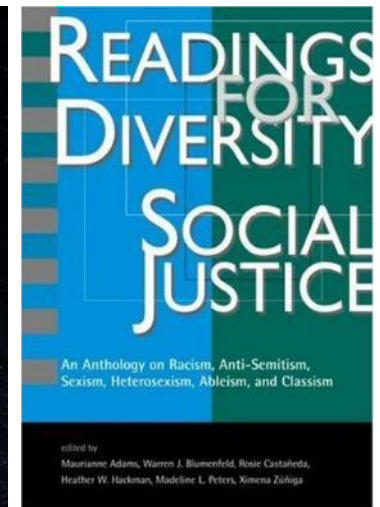
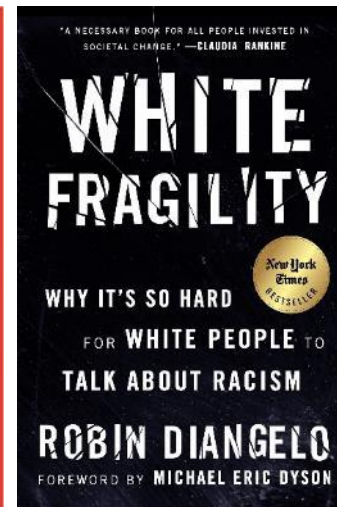
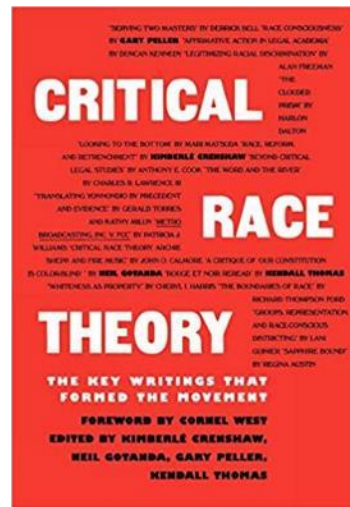
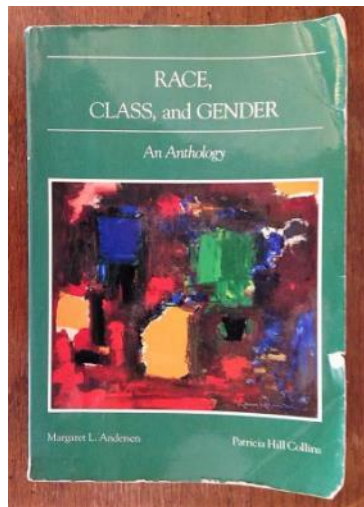
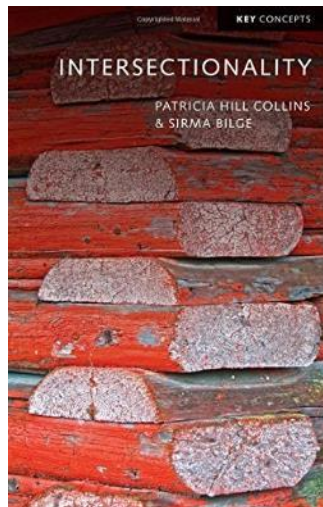
The central premises of contemporary critical theory

Premise I: Social binary

Premise II: Oppression through ideology

Premise III: Lived experience

Premise IV: Social justice



Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
 - Premise 1: Social binary
 - Premise 2: Oppression through ideology
 - Premise 3: Lived experience
 - Premise 4: Social justice
 - The strengths of critical theory
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?

Premise #1: Society is divided into oppressed and oppressor groups

64

Is Everyone Really Equal?

Figure 5.1. Group Identities Across Relations of Power

Minoritized/Target Group	Oppression	Dominant/ Agent Group
Peoples of Color	Racism	White
Poor Working Class	Classism	Owning Class
Middle Class		
Women; Transgender; Genderqueer	Sexism	(cis)Men
Gays; Lesbians; Bisexuals; Two Spirit	Heterosexism	Heterosexuals
Muslims; Buddhists; Jews; Hindus; and other non-Christ- ian groups	Religious Oppression Anti-Semitism	Christians
People with Disabilities	Ableism	Able-bodied
Immigrants (perceived)	Nationalism	Citizens (perceived)
Indigenous Peoples	Colonialism	White Settlers

Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
 - Premise 1: Social binary
 - Premise 2: Oppression through ideology
 - Premise 3: Lived experience
 - Premise 4: Social justice
 - The strengths of critical theory
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?

Premise #2: Oppression occurs through hegemonic power

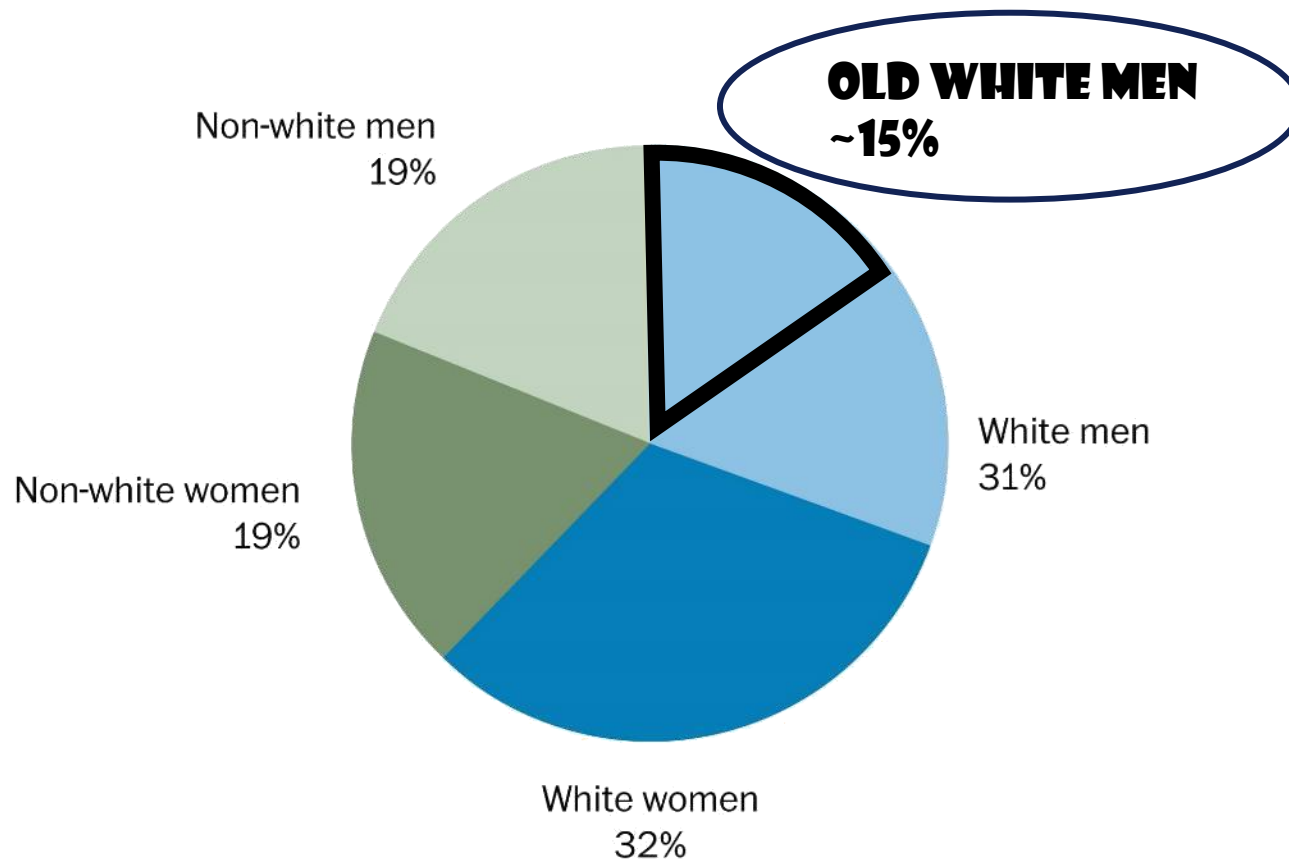
“oppression also traditionally carries a strong connotation of conquest and colonial domination... New left social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, however, shifted the meaning of the concept of oppression. **In its new usage, oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society...** Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people’s choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in **unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols.**” – Iris Young, “Five Faces of Oppression,” *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, p. 36



“**Marcuse’s notions of ‘one dimensional thought’...complements the critical theory tradition to better understand how hegemony, as cultural domination, normalizes and sustains the political/economic power of particular historic blocs** – the ruling coalition of economic, political and cultural elites” – Lauren Langman, “From Domination to Liberation: Marcuse, Gramsci, and a Critical Theory of Social Mobilization”, p.14, *Conference Papers – American Sociological Association*.



Premise #2: Oppression occurs through hegemonic power



Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
 - Premise 1: Social binary
 - Premise 2: Oppression through ideology
 - Premise 3: Lived experience
 - Premise 4: Social justice
 - The strengths of critical theory
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?

Premise #3: 'Lived experience' gives oppressed groups privileged access to truth

“The idea that objectivity is best reached only through rational thought is a specifically **Western and masculine way of thinking** – one that we will challenge throughout this book.” – Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, “Reconstructing Knowledge,” in Anderson and Collins, *Race, Class, and Gender*, p. 4-5



Premise #3: 'Lived experience' gives oppressed groups privileged access to truth

Oppression and epistemology:



Privilege



Internalized oppression

Lived
experience



Liberatory consciousness

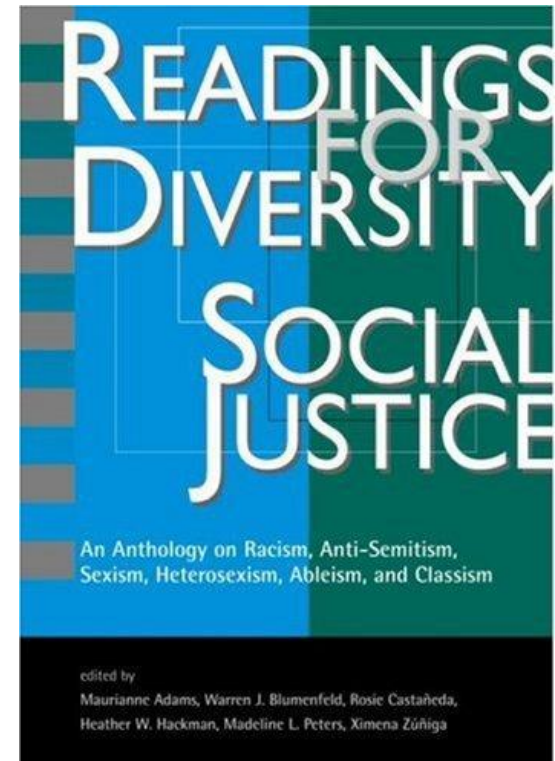
Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
 - Premise 1: Social binary
 - Premise 2: Oppression through ideology
 - Premise 3: Lived experience
 - Premise 4: Social justice
 - The strengths of critical theory
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?

Premise #4: Social justice demands the liberation of oppressed groups

Definition of social justice:

“Prior to celebrating diversity, we must first eliminate intolerance. No matter what form it takes or who does it, we must all take action to stop intolerance when it happens. Working towards a celebration of diversity implies working for **social justice – the elimination of all forms of social oppression...** Social injustice takes many forms. It can be injustice based on a **person’s gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, or economic class.**” – Mary McClintock, “How to Interrupt Oppressive Behavior,” *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, p. 483



Unifying themes of critical theory

“the cluster of philosophical approaches to [issues of identity is] **known by the umbrella term critical theory**. Critical theory is today a diverse phenomenon that draws deeply and variously on strands of Marxist thought, psychoanalysis, feminist theory, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, queer theory, and deconstruction... at the core of the various approaches of critical theorists lies a relatively simple set of convictions: **the world is to be divided up between those who have power and those who do not; the dominant Western narrative of truth is really an ideological construct designed to preserve the power structure of the status quo; and the goal of critical theory is therefore to destabilize this power structure by destabilizing the dominant narratives that are used to justify –to ‘naturalize’– it**” - Trueman



Outline

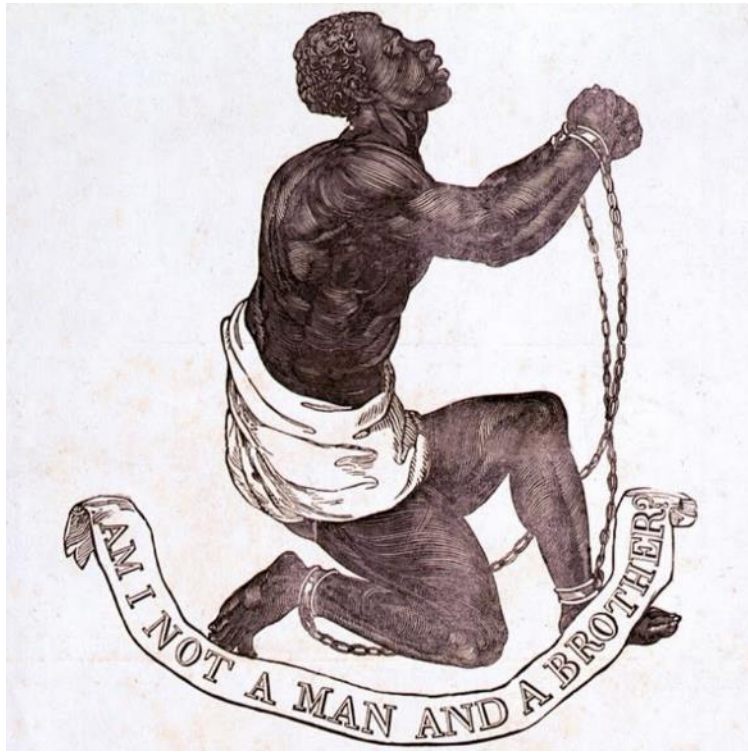
- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
 - Premise 1: Social binary
 - Premise 2: Oppression through ideology
 - Premise 3: Lived experience
 - Premise 4: Social justice
 - The strengths of critical theory
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?

Strength #1. Emphasis on the sinfulness of oppression

- “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.” – Is. 1:17
- “Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.” – Zech. 7:20
- “Love your neighbor as yourself.” – Mark 12:30
- “Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts” – James 5:4



Strength #2. Focus on structures, systems, and norms



Strength #3: Recognition of hegemonic power



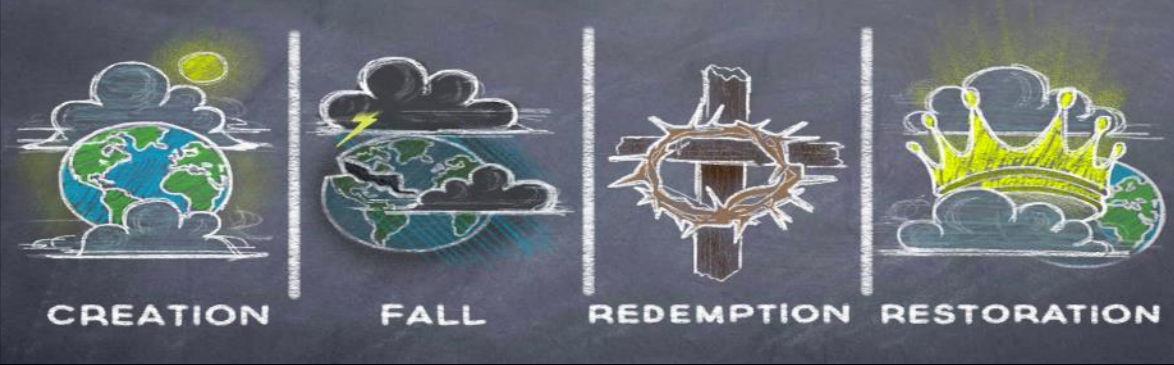
Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
 - Worldview
 - Epistemology
 - Adversarial identities
 - Hegemonic power
- What can we do?

Worldview questions

- Who are we?
- What is our fundamental problem as human beings?
- What is the solution to our problem?
- What is our primary moral duty?
- What is our purpose in life?

Christianity and critical theory are competing worldviews

Christianity	 <p>CREATION FALL REDEMPTION RESTORATION</p>			
Critical theory	----	<p>Patriarchy White supremacy Heteronormativity Toxic masculinity</p> <p>OPPRESSION</p> <p>Classism Ageism Ableism Cisgenderism</p>	<p>Protest Resistance</p> <p>ACTIVISM</p> <p>Education Awareness</p>	<p>Equity Power reversal</p> <p>LIBERATION</p> <p>Justice Diversity</p>

Worldview questions

	Christianity	Critical theory
Who are we?	God's creatures	Members of various groups
What is our problem?	Sin	Oppression
What is the solution?	Jesus	Liberation
What is our duty?	Loving God	Liberating the oppressed
What is our purpose?	Glorifying God	Working for liberation

Critical theory as worldview

“we now have Social Justice texts--forming a kind of Gospel of Social Justice--that express, with absolute certainty, that all white people are racist, all men are sexist, racism and sexism are systems that can exist and oppress absent even a single person with racist or sexist intentions or beliefs..., sex is not biological and exists on a spectrum, language can be literal violence, denial of gender identity is killing people, the wish to remedy disability and obesity is hateful, and everything needs to be decolonized.



Does this sound like a metanarrative? That's because it is. Social Justice scholarship and its educators and activists see these principles and conclusions as *The Truth* According to Social Justice--and they treat it as though they have discovered the analogue of the germ theory of disease, but for bigotry and oppression”

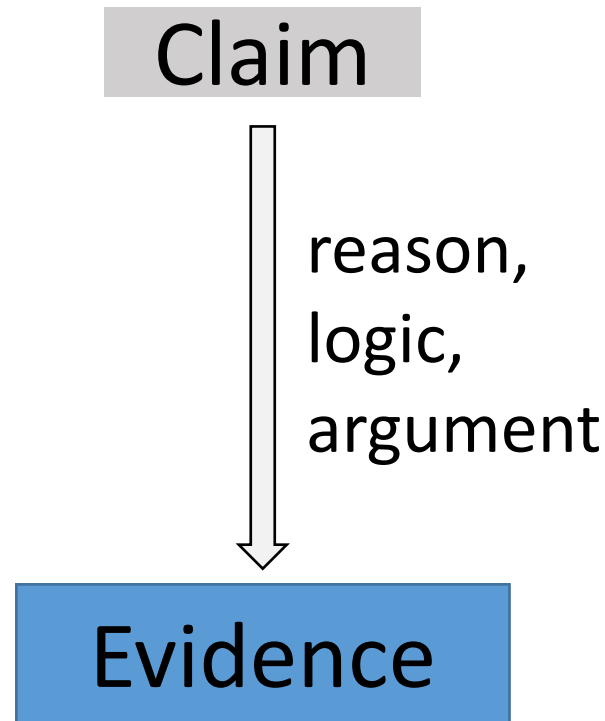
-Pluckrose and Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, p. 182-183



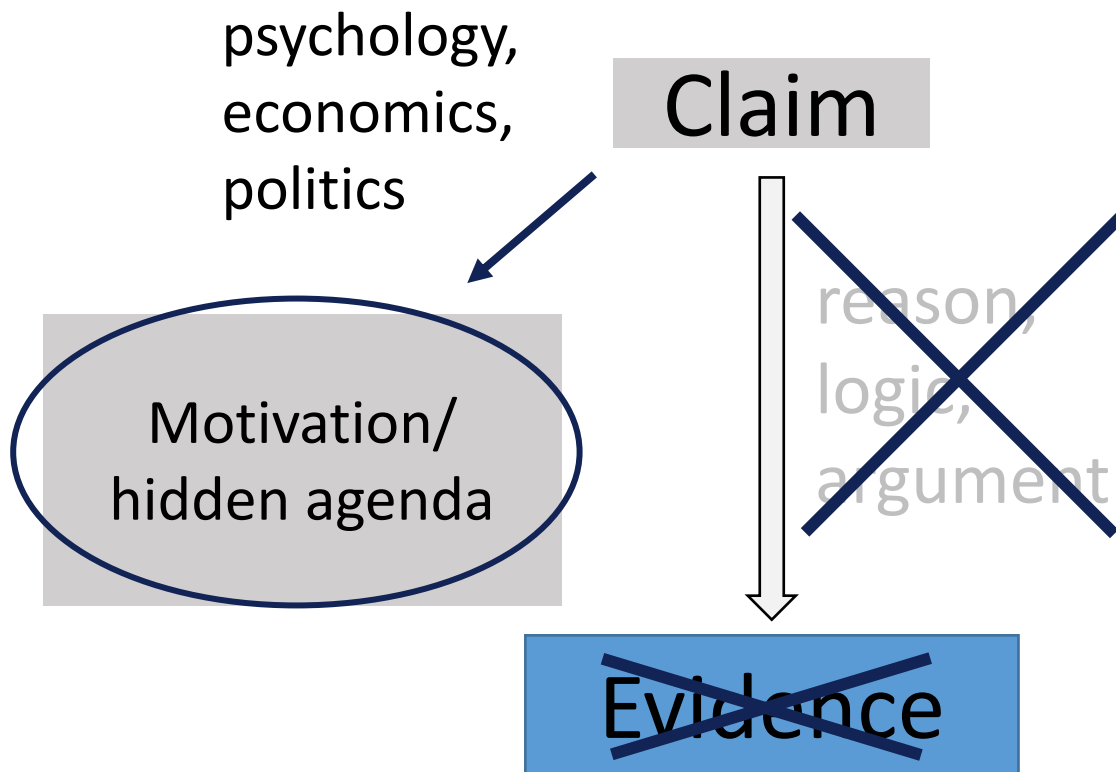
Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
 - Worldview
 - Epistemology
 - Adversarial identities
 - Hegemonic power
- What can we do?

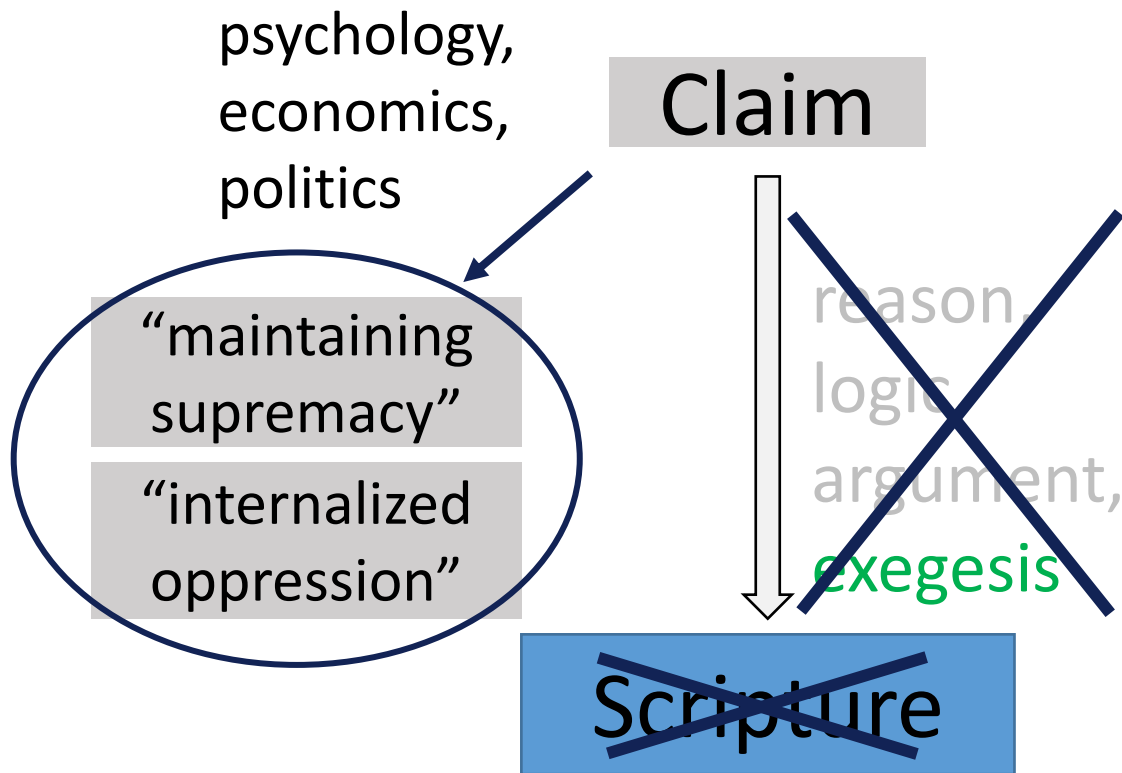
Epistemology



Bulverism



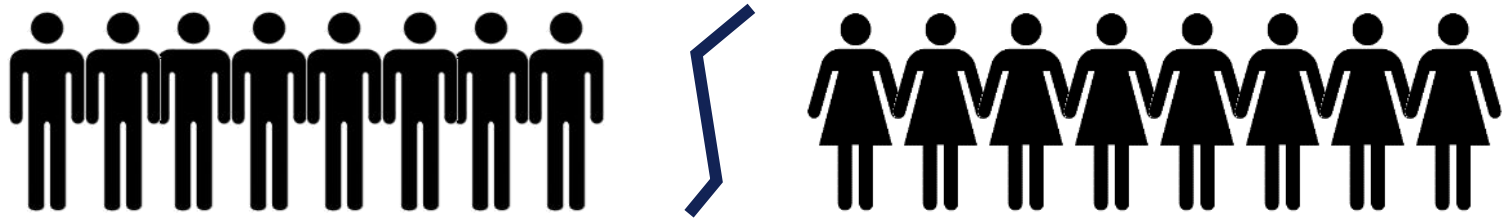
Epistemology



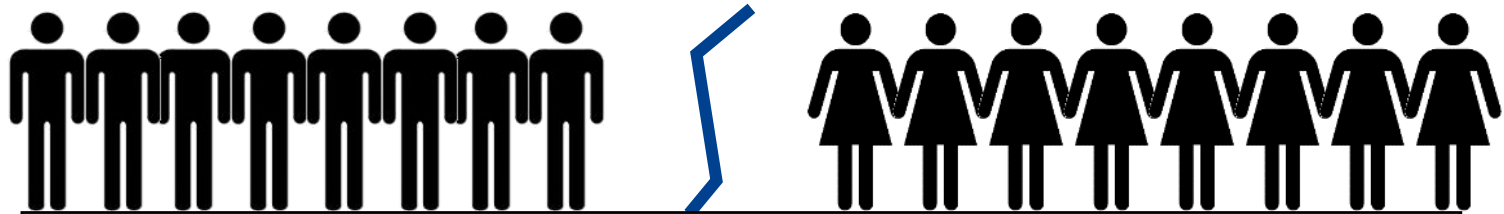
Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
 - Worldview
 - Epistemology
 - Adversarial identities
 - Hegemonic power
- What can we do?

Identity and solidarity



Identity and solidarity



Creation

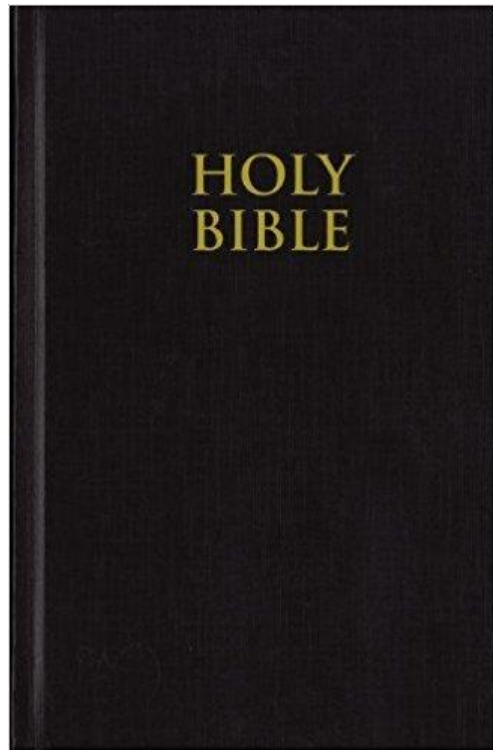
Sin

Redemption

Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
 - Worldview
 - Epistemology
 - Adversarial identities
 - Hegemonic power
- What can we do?

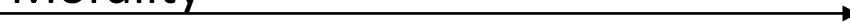
Christianity as hegemonic discourse



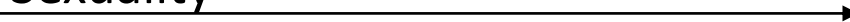
Religion



Morality



Sexuality




Gender



etc...



Christianity and critical theory are competing worldviews

Christianity	 <div> <div>CREATION</div> <div>FALL</div> <div>REDEMPTION</div> <div>RESTORATION</div> </div>			
Critical theory	<p>-----</p>	<p> Patriarchy White supremacy Heteronormativity Toxic masculinity OPPRESSION Classism Ageism Ableism Cisgenderism </p>	<p> Protest Resistance ACTIVISM Education Awareness </p>	<p> Equality Power reversal LIBERATION Justice Diversity </p>

Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?

- Acknowledge and fight racism
- Be charitable
- Recognize the biblical issues at stake
- Read broadly

Acknowledge and fight racism



Acknowledge and fight racism



Acknowledge and fight racism



Acknowledge and fight racism



Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?
 - Acknowledge and fight racism
 - Be charitable
 - Recognize the biblical issues at stake
 - Read broadly

Be charitable



LET EVERY PERSON BE
**QUICK TO HEAR,
SLOW TO SPEAK,
SLOW TO ANGER.**

- JAMES 1:19 ESV -

Don't be that guy



Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?
 - Acknowledge and fight racism
 - Be charitable
 - Recognize the biblical issues at stake
 - Read broadly

What's at stake

- Our primary identity is in Christ, not in race, ethnicity, gender, or anything else. (Gal. 3:26-28, Phil. 3:3-11)
- We can only repent for our own sins. (Ez. 18:14-20, Deut. 24:16 and Jer. 31:27-34)
- No one's "lived experience" makes them infallible. (Prov. 14:12, Jer. 17:9)
- Biblical justice means "giving people their due," not "dismantling hegemonic norms." (Rom. 13:1-7, Is. 1:17)
- Diversity is not always good. (Jdg. 21:25, Rev. 17:13-14)
- The gospel is an indicative, not an imperative. (Rom. 4:5, John 6:29)

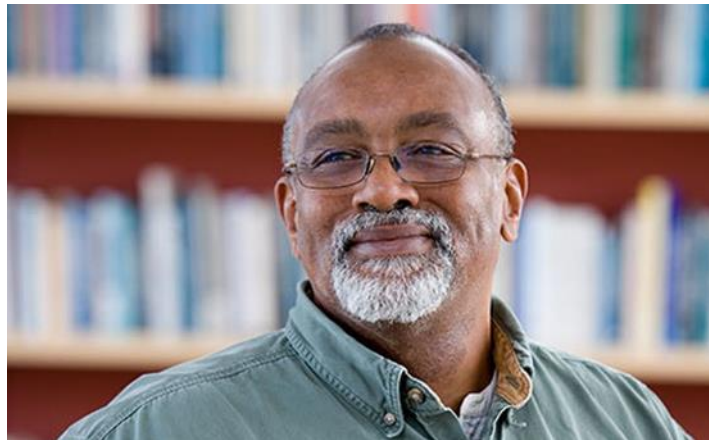
Outline

- Why should we care?
- What is critical theory?
- What are the problems with critical theory?
- What can we do?
 - Acknowledge and fight racism
 - Be charitable
 - Recognize the biblical issues at stake
 - Read broadly

Read broadly



Read broadly



Read broadly

“I do not share the sentiment of those who believe that reading beyond the Bible is unwarranted, unwise, unfruitful, or unfaithful.. One of the reasons we are so committed to home education is the flexibility it gives us in terms of curricular choices. For that reason, we either encourage or require our kids to read Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*; Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species by the Means of Natural Selection: Or, the Survival of the Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*; *The Autobiography of Malcolm X...The Souls of Black Folk...* by W.E.B. Du Bois...the essays of Ralph Ellison; the poetry of Langston Hughes... *The Chronicles of Narnia*; *The Lord of the Rings*; and several books on Greek mythology...” – Baucham, *Fault Lines*, p. 115-116



Read broadly

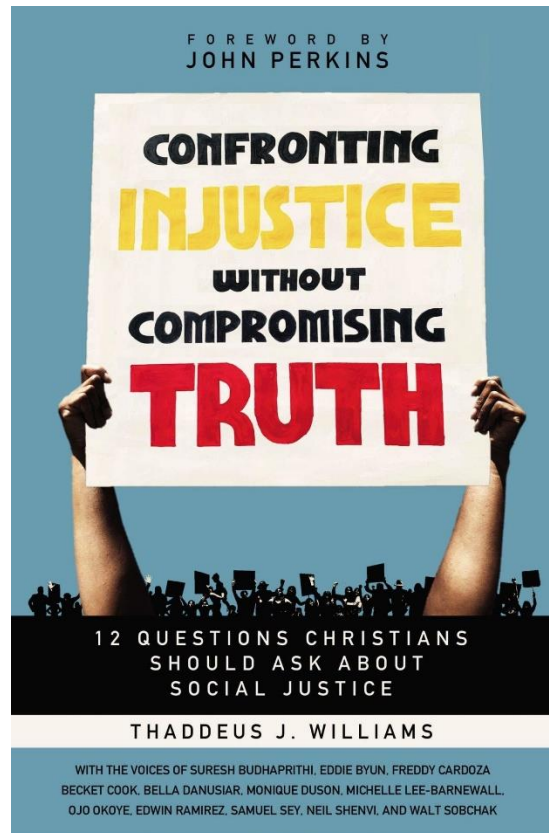
“I spend nearly as much time reading books with which I disagree as those which affirm my positions...a few years back, I had a lot of time on the train, so I was able to read Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me* on one part of the journey and *Hillbilly Elegy* on another. **And I was able to identify with and profit from both.**” – Baucham, *Fault Lines*, p. 117



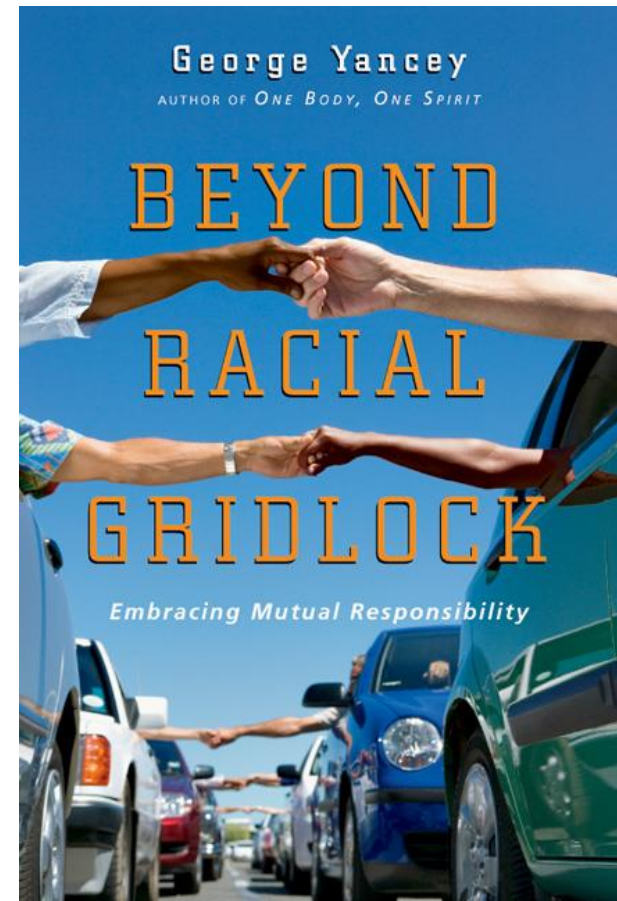
Read broadly

- Reading broadly forces you to read critically
- Reading broadly exposes your blind spots
- Reading broadly inoculates against error
- Reading broadly **does not require** agreement

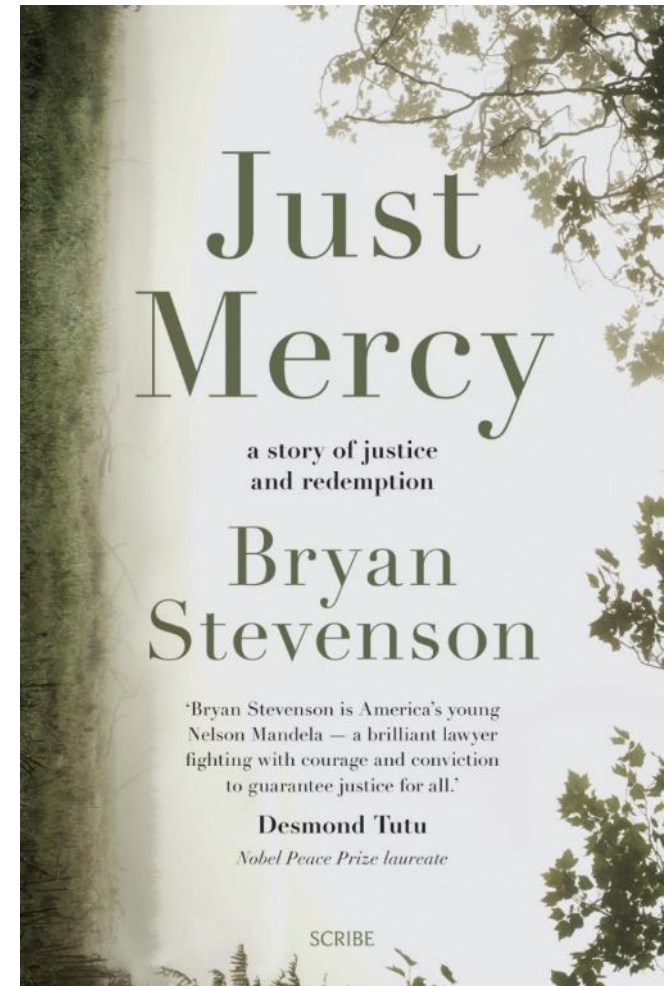
Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth by Thaddeus Williams



Beyond Racial Gridlock, by Dr. George Yancey



Just Mercy, Bryan Stevenson



Acknowledgements

Dr. Christina Shenvi



Dr. Pat Sawyer



- “The Incompatibility of Critical Theory and Christianity,” *The Gospel Coalition*
- “Gender, Intersectionality, and Critical Theory,” *Eikon*
- “Engaging Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement” *Ratio Christi*
- shenviapologetics.com/defend19
- Twitter @NeilShenvi, @RealPatSawyer