



Critical Race Theory: A deep dive

Dr. Neil Shenvi

American Christian Tours

Jan. 12-13, 2023

Outline

- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

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**

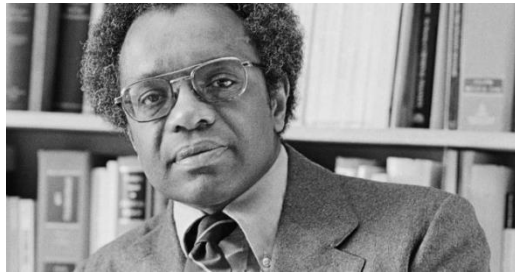
**intro to
critical
race
theory**

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



Crenshaw: “These refusals [to recruit scholars of color] led to our eventual self-declaration as an offshoot of Critical Legal Studies. We discovered ourselves to be critical theorists who did race and we were racial justice advocates who did critical theory. ... I sent out a call to attend a retreat called ‘New Developments in Critical Race Theory’... [At that time] there were no ‘new events’ in critical race theory because CRT hadn’t had any old ones. It didn’t exist. It was made up as a name.”

The Origins of Critical Race Theory



Derrick Bell



Kimberle Crenshaw



Gloria Ladson-Billings



William Tate



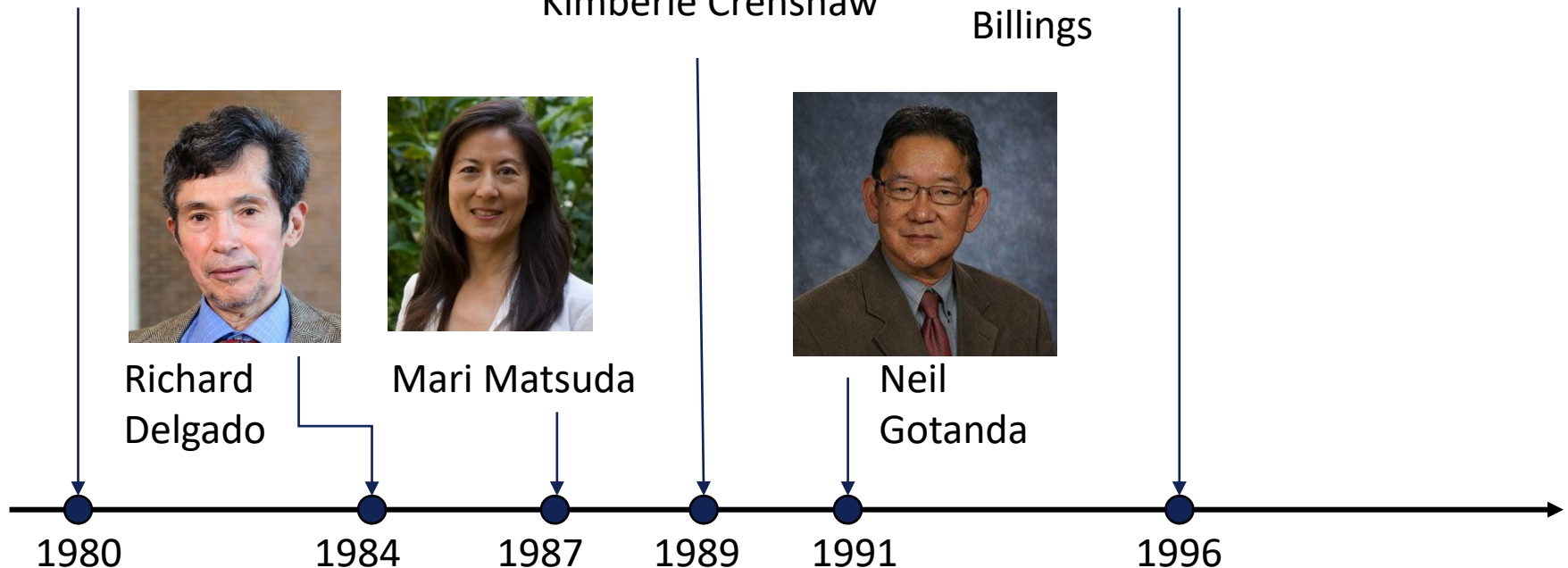
Richard Delgado



Mari Matsuda



Neil Gotanda



Outline

- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
 - Racism is normal
 - Racism is concealed
 - Lived experience is critical
 - Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression
 - Positives of CRT
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

The Core Tenets of CRT

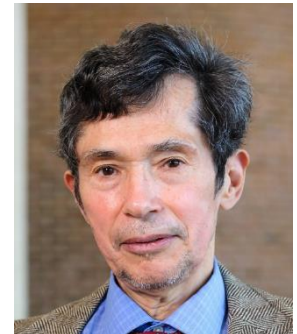
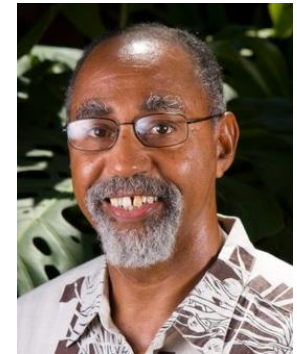
- Racism is normal, permanent, and pervasive
- Racism is concealed beneath principles like colorblindness, meritocracy, and objectivity
- Lived experience is necessary to fully understand racism
- Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression

Outline

- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
 - Racism is normal
 - Racism is concealed
 - Lived experience is critical
 - Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression
 - Positives of CRT
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

Racism is normal, permanent, and pervasive

“Critical race theory recognizes that **racism is endemic to American life**... [W]e ask how these traditional interests [like federalism, privacy, traditional values or established property interests] serve as **vessels of racial subordination**.” – Matsuda et al.



Racism is normal, permanent, and pervasive

“Racism is a **normal part of American life**, often lacking the ability to be distinctively recognized... A CRT lens unveils the various forms in which racism **continually manifests itself**, despite espoused institutional values regarding equity and social justice.” – Harper, Patton, and Wooden



Harper, Patton, and Wooden, “Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis of Policy Efforts,” *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 2009, p. 389-414.

Racism is normal, permanent, and pervasive

“Racism is **normal, not aberrant**, in American society. Because it is an **ingrained feature of our landscape**, racism looks **ordinary and natural** to persons in our culture.” – Delgado and Stefancic



Racism is normal, permanent, and pervasive

“Race: the characteristics ascribed to a particular race **can and will change to fit a dominant group’s interest.** In this way, **racist behavior is not an aberration in everyday life**; it is often normal practice in **deeply racialized** social systems.” – Kafi Kumasi



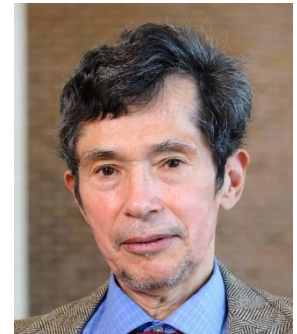
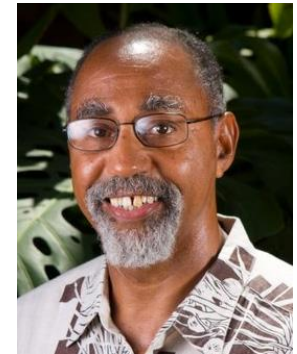
Kafi D. Kumasi, “Critical Race Theory and Education: Mapping a Legacy of Activism and Scholarship” in Levinson’s [*Beyond Critique*](#) (p. 209-213).

Outline

- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
 - Racism is normal
 - Racism is concealed
 - Lived experience is critical
 - Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression
 - Positives of CRT
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

Racism is concealed beneath principles like colorblindness, meritocracy, and objectivity

“Critical race theory expresses **skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy**”— Matsuda et al.



Racism is concealed beneath principles like colorblindness, meritocracy, and objectivity

“liberalism, neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy... camouflage [how] racial advantage propels the self-interests, power, and privileges of the dominant group.” – Harper, Patton, and Wooden



Harper, Patton, and Wooden, “Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis of Policy Efforts,” *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 2009, p. 389-414.

Racism is concealed beneath principles like colorblindness, meritocracy, and objectivity

“the overall ethos of majority culture promotes and promulgates a notion of **‘color-blindness’** and **‘meritocracy.’**

These two notions are mutually intertwined and serve to marginalize certain enclaves of people—predominately people of color.” – Hartlep



Racism is concealed beneath principles like colorblindness, meritocracy, and objectivity

“critical race scholars are **discontented with liberalism...** **Colorblindness** can be admirable... But it **can be perverse**, for example, when it stands in the way of taking account of differences in order to help people in need... **Crits are suspicious of another liberal mainstay, namely, rights.** – Delgado and Stefancic

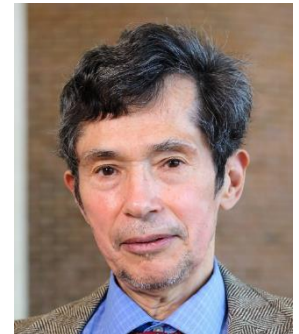
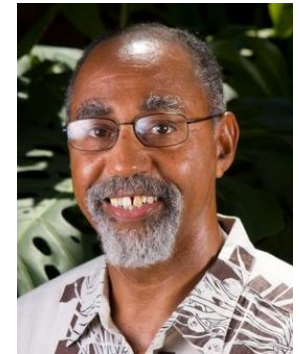


Outline

- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
 - Racism is normal
 - Racism is concealed
 - Lived experience is critical
 - Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression
 - Positives of CRT
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

Lived experience is critical to fully understand racism

“Critical race theory insists on recognition of the **experiential knowledge of people of color**...This knowledge is gained from critical reflection on **the lived experience of racism**...”– Matsuda et al.



Lived experience is critical to fully understand racism

“CRT gives voice to the unique perspectives and **lived experiences of people of color**... CRT uses counternarratives as a way to highlight discrimination, offer racially different interpretations of policy, and challenge the universality of assumptions made about people of color.” – Harper, Patton, and Wooden



Harper, Patton, and Wooden, “Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis of Policy Efforts,” *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 2009, p. 389-414.

Lived experience is critical to fully understand racism

“blacks experience the power of second sight from the perspective of antiblack prejudice... A CRT framework recognizes the centrality of experiential knowledge of people of color and views this knowledge as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination.” – Kafi Kumasi



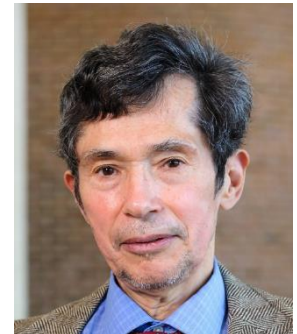
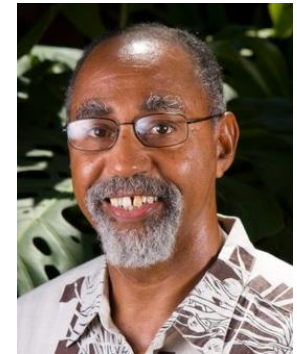
Kafi D. Kumasi, “Critical Race Theory and Education: Mapping a Legacy of Activism and Scholarship” in Levinson’s *Beyond Critique* (p. 209-213).

Outline

- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
 - Racism is normal
 - Racism is concealed
 - Lived experience is critical
 - Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression
 - Positives of CRT
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression

“Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as **part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression**. Racial oppression is experienced by many in tandem with oppressions on grounds of **gender, class, or sexual orientation**...The interests of all people of color require not just adjustments within existing hierarchies, but **a challenge to hierarchy itself**.”— Matsuda et al.



Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression

“CRT critiques [claims that]: one can fight racism without paying attention to **sexism, homophobia, economic exploitation**, and other forms of oppression or injustice.”—Harper, Patton, and Wooden



Harper, Patton, and Wooden, “Access and Equity for African American Students in Higher Education: A Critical Race Historical Analysis of Policy Efforts,” *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 2009, p. 389-414.

Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression

*“The Commitment to Social Justice: CRT is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to **racial, gender, and class oppression**... and works toward the elimination of **racism, sexism, and poverty** as well as the empowerment of **People of Color and other subordinated groups**” – Yosso*



Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression

“CRT scholars are critical of any sociological analyses that focus solely on race without recognizing that racial oppression exists in multiple layers based on **gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality.**” – Kafi Kumasi



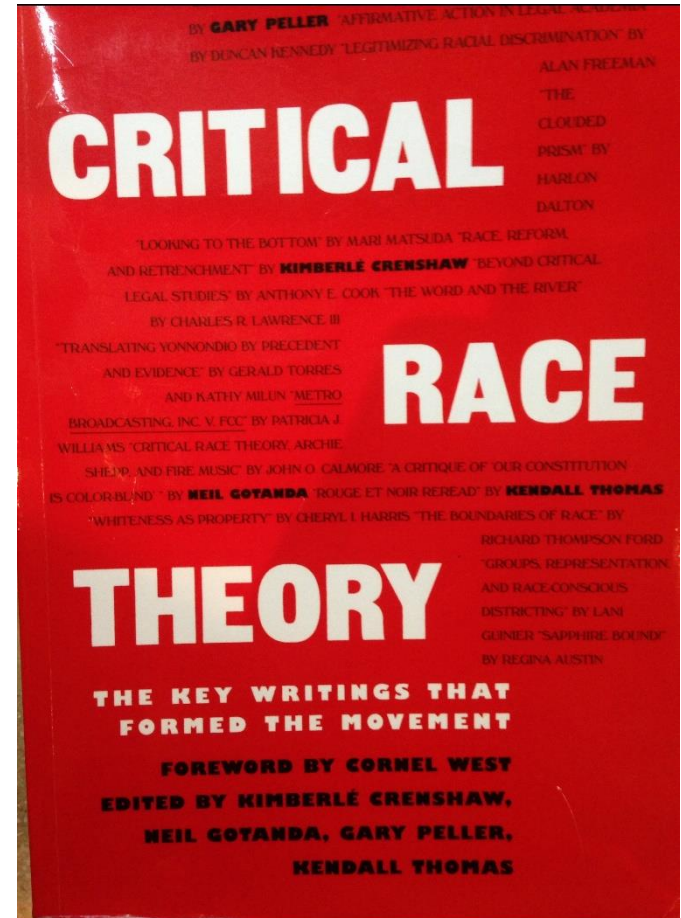
Kafi D. Kumasi, “Critical Race Theory and Education: Mapping a Legacy of Activism and Scholarship” in Levinson’s [*Beyond Critique*](#) (p. 209-213).

Outline

- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
 - Racism is normal
 - Racism is concealed
 - Lived experience is critical
 - Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression
- Positives of CRT
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

Positives of CRT

- Race is a social construct
- Racism has shaped our country's history
- Racism can infect systems

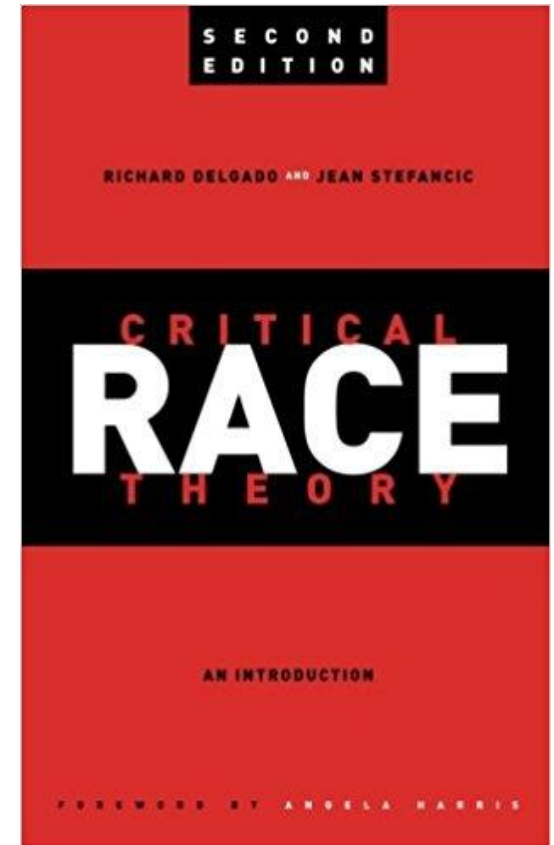


Outline

- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
 - Racism is normal
 - Racism is concealed
 - Lived experience is critical
 - Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression
 - Positives of CRT
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

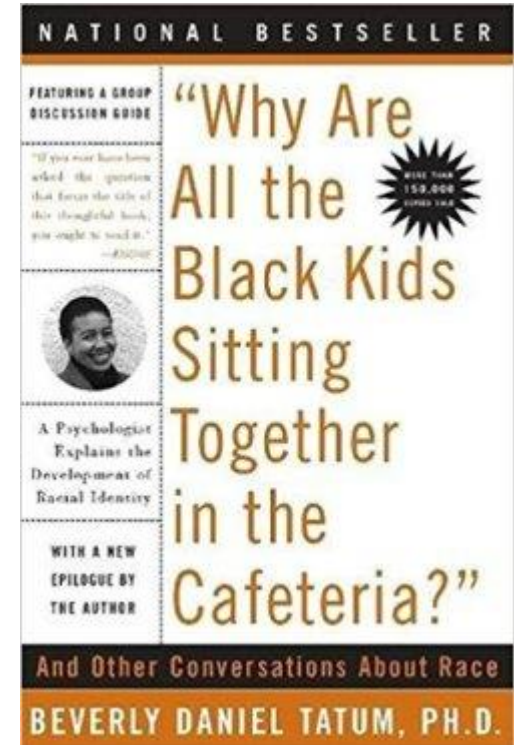
Problems with Critical Race Theory

- Racism as primarily sin, not system
- Sin, not racism, is pervasive
- Identity primarily in Christ, not ethnicity
- Truth primarily in Scripture, not experience
- Sin as lawlessness, not oppression



Racism as sin, not system

“People of color are not racist
because they do not systematically
benefit from racism... Using the same
logic, I reserve the word *sexist* for
men” - Tatum



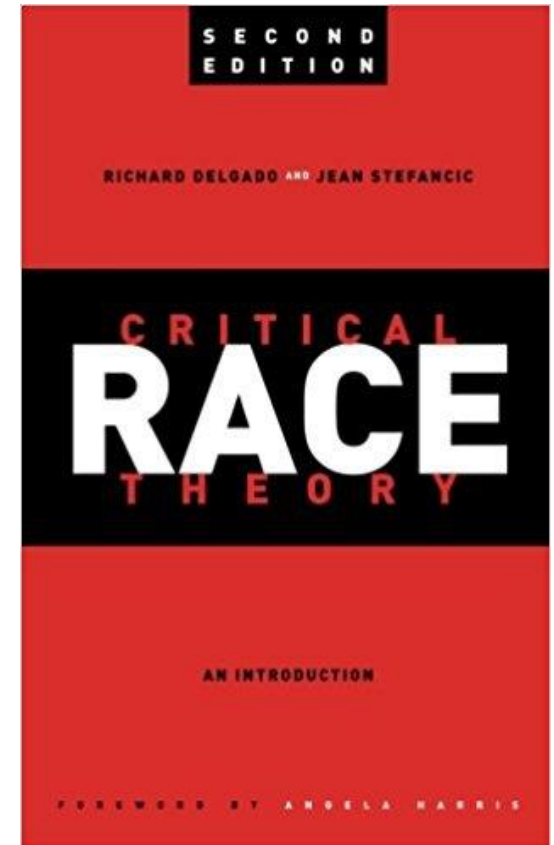
Racism as sin, not system

“if you are white in a white supremacist society, you are racist. If you are male in a patriarchy, you are sexist. If you are able-bodied, you are ableist. If you are anything above poverty in a capitalist society, you are classist. You can sometimes be all of these things at one.” - Oluo



Problems with Critical Race Theory

- Racism as primarily sin, not system
- Sin, not racism, is pervasive
- Identity primarily in Christ, not ethnicity
- Truth primarily in Scripture, not experience
- Sin as lawlessness, not oppression



Sin, not racism, is pervasive

“...the question is not ‘Did racism take place?’ but rather, **‘In which ways did racism manifest in this specific context?’**”¹

“Cross-racial friendships do not block out the dynamics of racism in the society at large, and these dynamics continue unabated... **Racism cannot be absent from your friendship.** No person of color whom I’ve met has said that racism isn’t at play in his or her friendships with white people. Some whites are more thoughtful, aware, and receptive to feedback than others, but **no cross-racial relationship is free from the dynamics of racism in this society.**”²



¹ Schroeder & DiAngelo. (2010). Addressing Whiteness in Nursing Education: The Sociopolitical Climate Project at the University of Washington School of Nursing. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 33 (3) 244-255.

² Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, (2018), p. 80-81

Sin, not racism, is pervasive

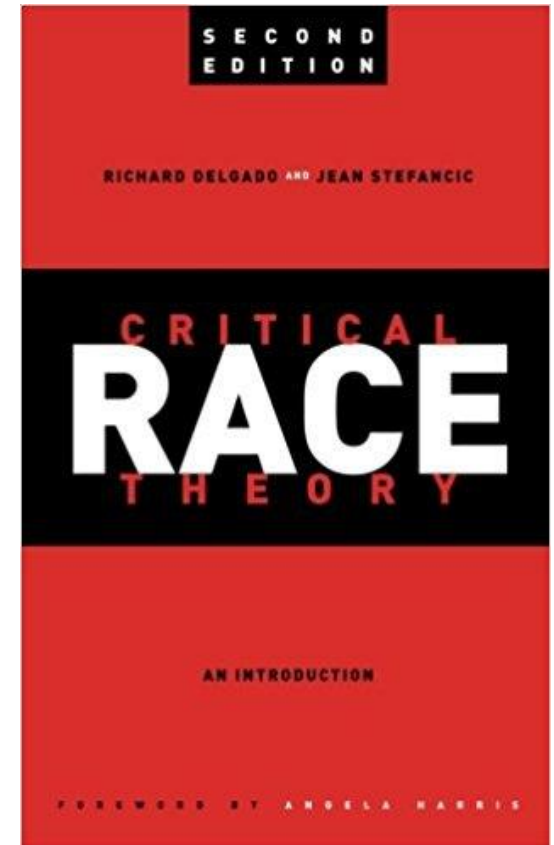
“Whiteness positions itself as the norm. It refuses to recognize itself for what it is. Its so-called ‘objectivity’ and ‘reason’ is its most potent and insidious tool for maintaining power”

“We need to see racism as structural in order to see its insidiousness. We need to see how it seeps, like a noxious gas, into everything” – Eddo-Lodge



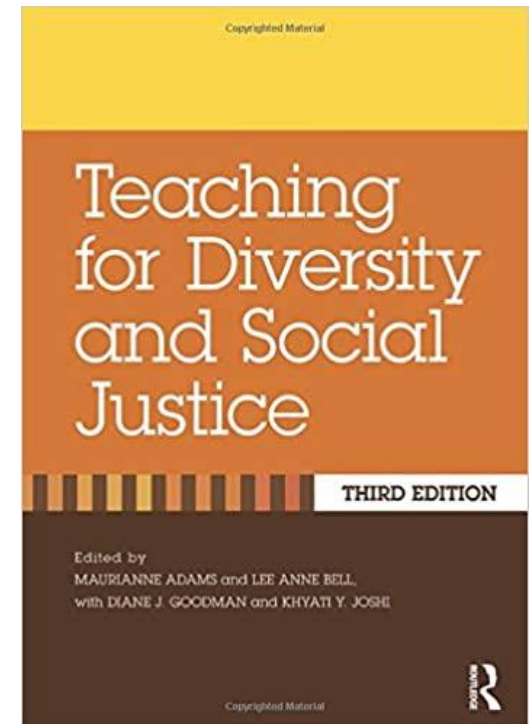
Problems with Critical Race Theory

- Racism as primarily sin, not system
- Sin, not racism, is pervasive
- Identity primarily in Christ, not ethnicity
- Truth primarily in Scripture, not experience
- Sin as lawlessness, not oppression



Identity in Christ, not ethnicity

“The binary terms *oppressor* and *oppressed*, for example, may raise **resistance from participants who cannot reconcile themselves as *oppressors*... or who resist the term *oppressed*...** On the other hand, we struggle to find other language that doesn’t trivialize the power and harm of the oppressive system” - Adams



Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, Pat Griffin, *Teachings for Diversity and Social Justice*, p. xxii, (2007)

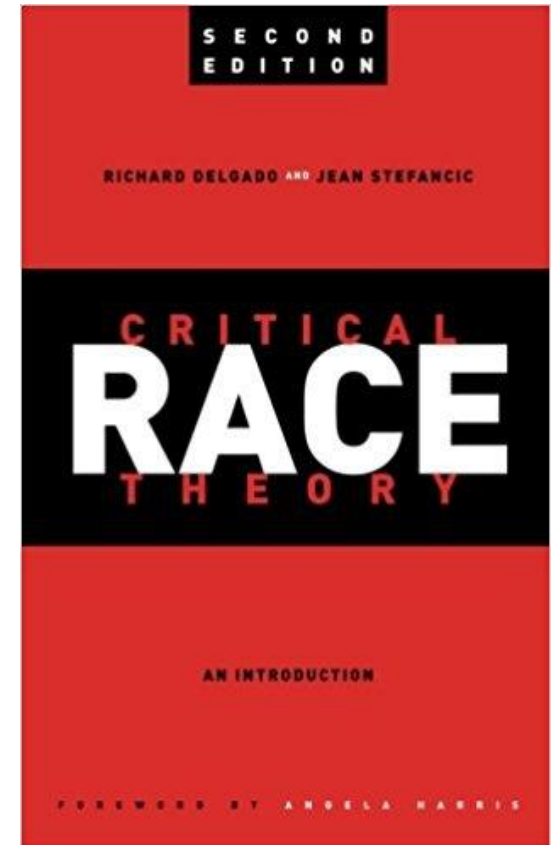
Identity in Christ, not ethnicity

“a positive white identity is an impossible goal. **White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy.** This does not mean that we should stop identifying as white and start claiming only to be Italian or Irish. To do so is to deny the reality of racism in the here and now, and this denial would simply be color-blind racism. Rather, I strive to be ‘less white.’ **To be less white is to be less racially oppressive.** I can build a wide range of authentic and sustained relationships across race and accept that I have racist patterns.” – DiAngelo



Problems with Critical Race Theory

- Racism as primarily sin, not system
- Sin, not racism, is pervasive
- Identity primarily in Christ, not ethnicity
- Truth primarily in Scripture, not experience
- Sin as lawlessness, not oppression



Truth in Scripture, not experience

“It is about race if a person of color thinks it is about race... whether or not someone is fallible is beside the point. We are, each and every one of us, a collection of our lived experiences...And **our experiences are valid.” - Oluo**



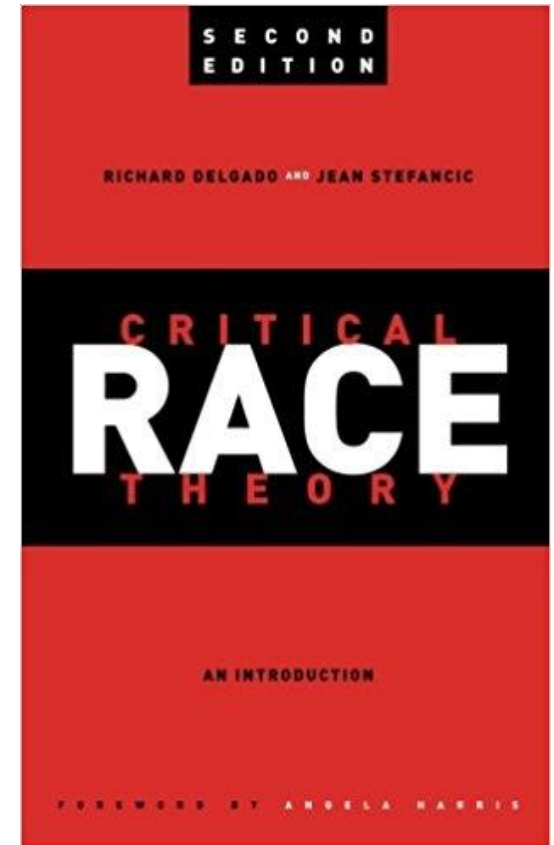
Truth in Scripture, not experience

“Identity politics and standpoint epistemology constitute two important dimensions of epistemic resistance for subordinated groups. **Identity politics valorizes the experiences of women, people of color, poor people, LGBTQ people, and similarly subordinated people as a source of epistemic agency.** By claiming the authority of experience, standpoint epistemology defends the integrity of individuals and groups in interpreting their own experiences.” - Collins



Problems with Critical Race Theory

- Racism as primarily sin, not system
- Sin, not racism, is pervasive
- Identity primarily in Christ, not ethnicity
- Truth primarily in Scripture, not experience
- Sin as lawlessness, not oppression



Sin as lawlessness, not oppression

Matrix of Oppression				
Social Identity Categories	Privileged Social Groups	Border Social Groups ↔	Targeted Social Groups	Ism
Race	White People	Biracial People (White/Latino, Black, Asian)	Asian, Black, Latino, Native People	Racism
Sex	Bio Men	Transsexual, Intersex People	Bio Women	Sexism
Gender	Gender Conforming Bio Men And Women	Gender Ambiguous Bio Men and Women	Transgender, Genderqueer, Intersex People	Transgender Oppression
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual People	Bisexual People	Lesbians, Gay Men	Heterosexism
Class	Rich, Upper Class People	Middle Class People	Working Class, Poor People	Classism
Ability/Disability	Temporarily Abled-Bodied People	People with Temporary Disabilities	People with Disabilities	Ableism
Religion	Protestants	Roman Catholic (historically)	Jews, Muslims, Hindus	Religious Oppression
Age	Adults	Young Adults	Elders, Young People	Ageism/Adultism



Sin as lawlessness, not oppression

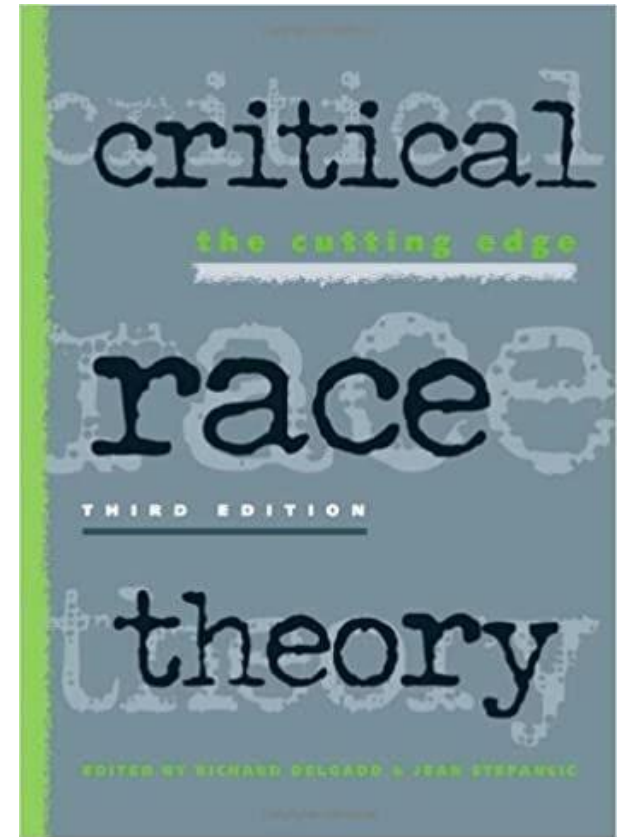
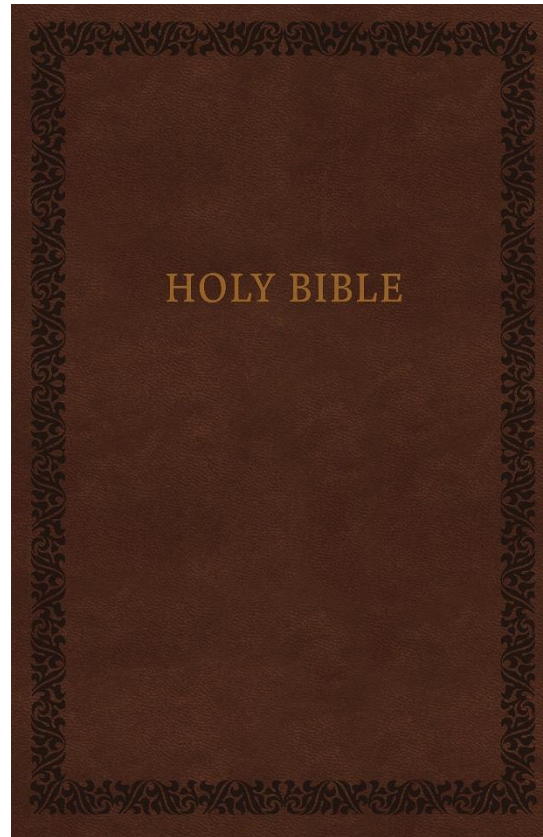
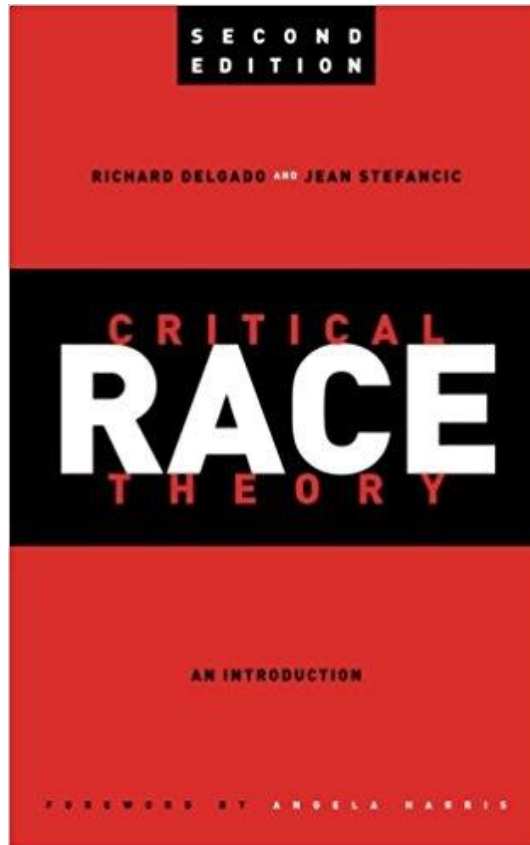
“Antiracist policies cannot eliminate class racism without anticapitalism policies. Anticapitalism cannot eliminate class racism without antiracism.”

“To truly be antiracist is to be feminist. To truly be feminist is to be antiracist”

“We cannot be antiracist if we are homophobic or transphobic... To be queer antiracist is to understand the privileges of my cisgender, of my masculinity, of my heterosexuality, of their intersections” - Kendi

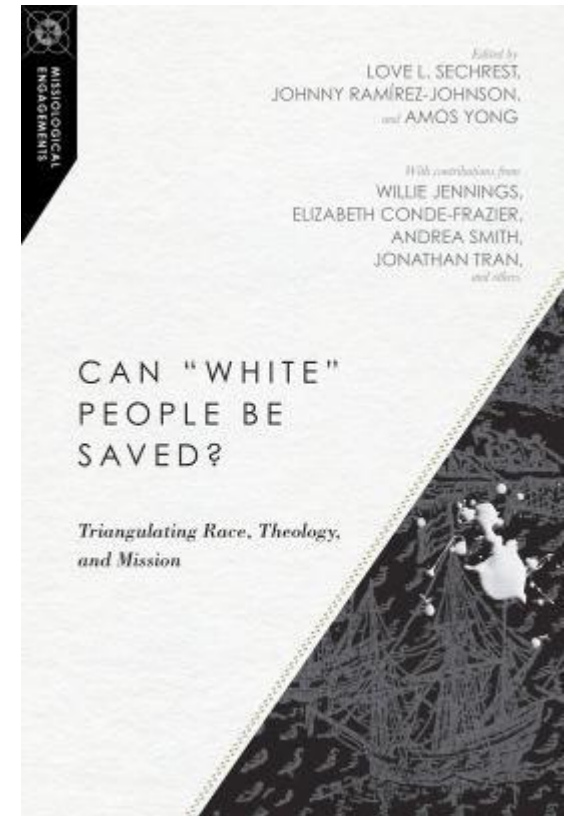


Mixing CRT and Christianity



Can 'White' People Be Saved?

“the essays in this volume deftly deploy **cutting-edge theory in racial and ethnic studies**” and draw on “**critical theorists [who] advocate for analyses of racism** that explore how other communities of color [outside the Black/White binary] experience the effects of racialization” (p. 10-11).

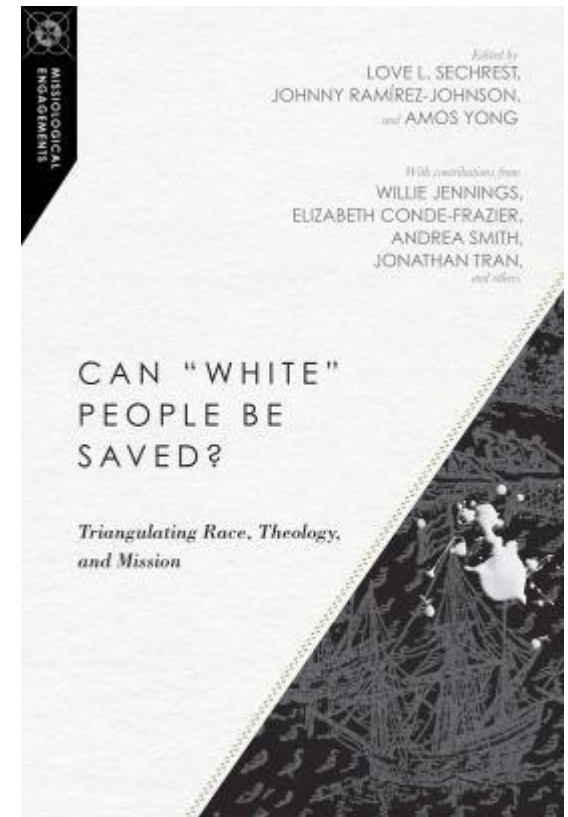


Can 'White' People Be Saved?

"Decolonizing Salvation" - Andrea Smith

"what we presume to be true of the Bible is primarily the result of the history of European interpretation as translated into European languages... **we would have a completely different understanding of the Bible if we read it through Indigenous languages** translated directly from Greek and Hebrew." (p. 54)

"According to the European positivist grammar of truth, if proposition p is true, then not- p must be false. **Indigenous epistemologies are not beholden to such logic systems.** Beliefs, even systems of belief that seem contradictory to European and Euro-American culture—for example, Christianity and Indigenous religions—can coexist in Indigenous culture" (p. 62)

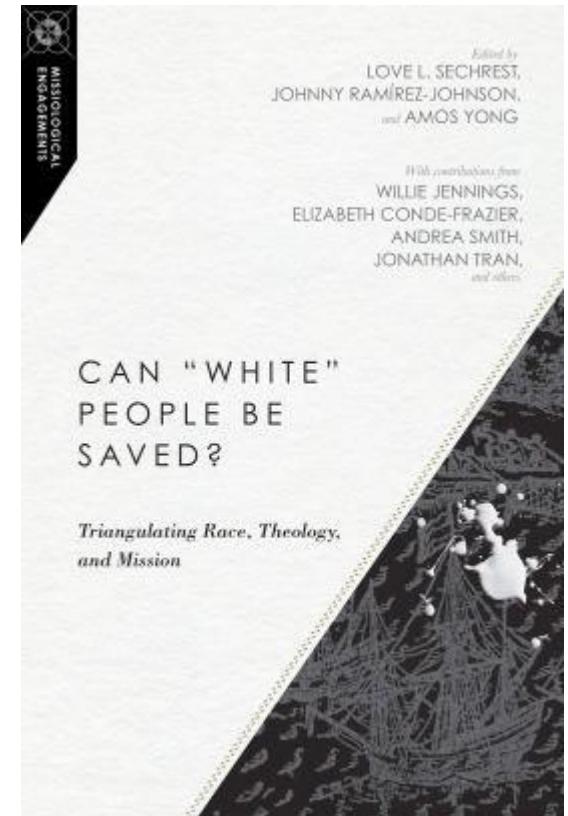


Can 'White' People Be Saved?

“The End of ‘Mission’: Christian Witness and the Decentering of White Identity” – Andrew Draper

“whiteness is best understood as a religious system of pagan idol worship that thrives on mutually reinforcing circularity between the image (the ideal or the form) and the social construction of those who worship it...As idolatry, whiteness must be dealt with like any such cultic system: its high places must be torn down and its altars laid low” (p. 177-178)

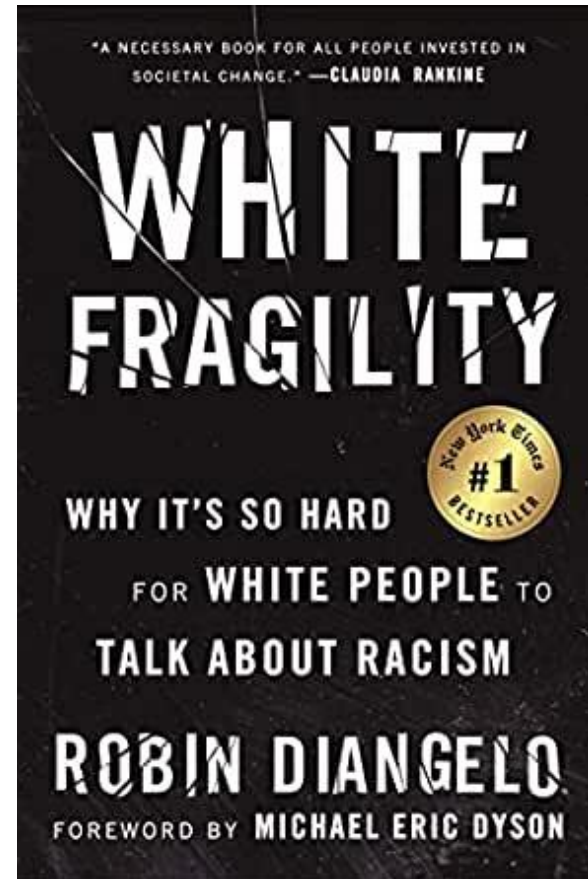
“If... whiteness is a way of life into which its novitiates are disciplined, then a **Christian discipleship that entails a deconversion from whiteness is necessary if any true experience of reconciliation with God, others, the creation, and ourselves is to take place.** (p. 181)



Outline

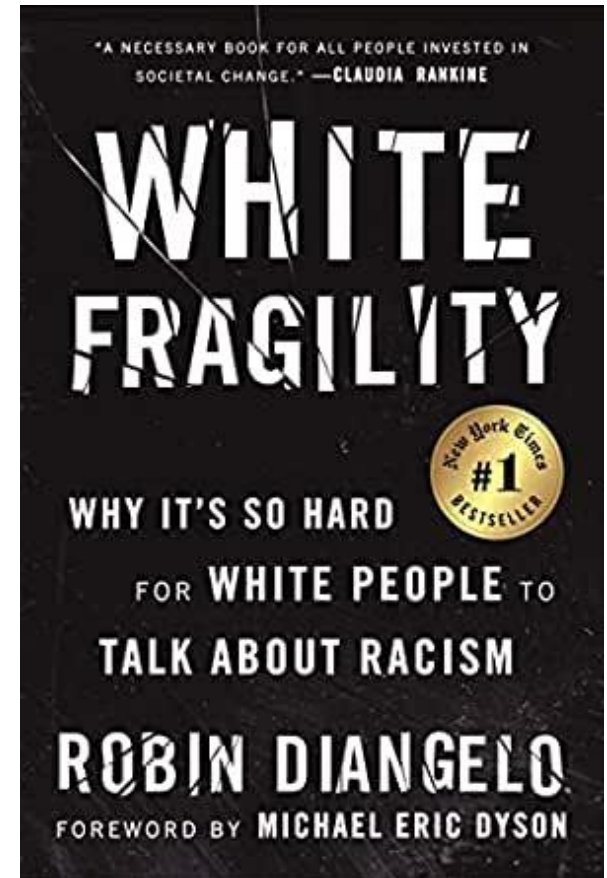
- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
 - Racism is normal
 - Racism is concealed
 - Lived experience is critical
 - Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression
 - Positives of CRT
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

Robin DiAngelo



Robin DiAngelo

- Critical Social Justice
- All whites are racist
- The white fragility Kafkatrap
- Roadmap to alienation



Critical Social Justice



Minoritized/Target Group	Oppression	Dominant/Agent Group
People of Color	Racism	White
Poor, Working-Class	Classism	Middle-Class, Wealthy
Women	Sexism	Men
Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, +	Heterosexism	Heterosexuals
Transgender, Gender Queer, Gender Non-Conforming, Intersexed	Transgender Oppression	Gender-Conforming; Cisgender
Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, etc.	Religious Oppression	Christians
People with Disabilities	Ableism	Able-bodied
Jews	Anti-Semitism	Non-Jews (gentiles)
Immigrants (perceived), Indigenous peoples	Nationalism	Citizens (perceived)
Elderly	Ageism	Young Middle-aged
Children	Adultism	Adults

Figure 11: Oppression chart.

Robin DiAngelo, *What Does It Mean to Be White*, (2016), p. 64

The white fragility Kafkatrap



White fragility is “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress ... becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves” (p. 103).

Manifestations of white fragility include:

Feelings:

Singled out

Attacked

Silenced

Guilty

Accused

Judged

Angry

Scared

Behaviors:

Crying

Physically leaving

Emotionally
withdrawing

Arguing

Denying

Seeking absolution

Claims:

I already know all this.

You are judging me

You are generalizing

I disagree

Some people find offense
where there is none.

Roadmap to Alienation



“White neurosis and the need for Peoples of Color to placate White neurosis due to real fears of White supremacy is the interplay of racial cray-cray, a process that plays out in the racial dynamics of urban classrooms. **Under the power of Whiteness, the racial cray-cray becomes a socially-sanctioned process of engaging in the lies of White neurosis that everyone is forced to perform.**”

Roadmap to Alienation



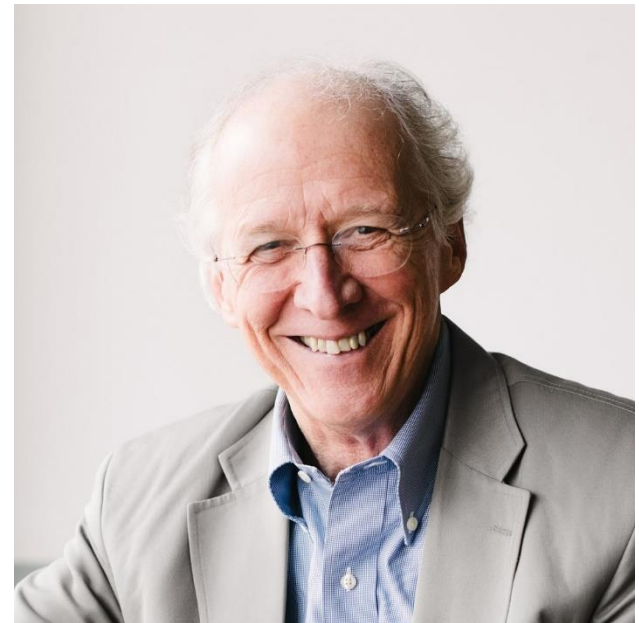
“Thandeka (1999) argues that **raising White children to be White is a form of child abuse** because ‘the child learns to silence and then deny its own resonant feelings towards racially proscribed others, not because it wishes to become White, but because it wishes to remain within the community this is quite literally its life’ (p. 24)... If Whites are reared in this manner, then emotional and psychological damage on the White psyche results...we hope to offer a **new approach to racial healing by affirming Thandeka’s (1999) postulation of Whiteness as a form of child abuse** and tracing what happens when that abuse goes unchecked”

Outline

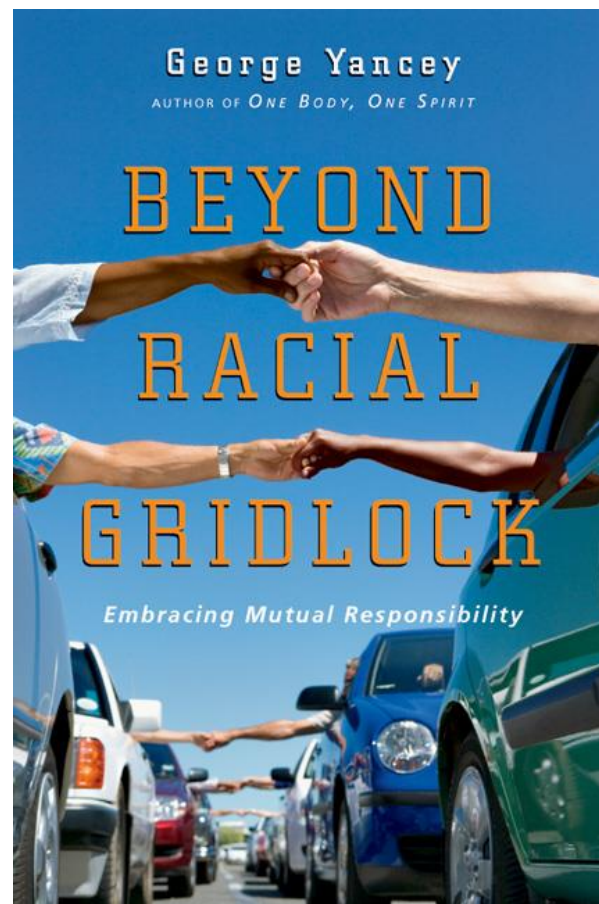
- Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory
- What is Critical Race Theory?
 - Racism is normal
 - Racism is concealed
 - Lived experience is critical
 - Racism is part of interlocking systems of oppression
 - Positives of CRT
- Problems with Critical Race Theory
- Excursus on Robin DiAngelo
- Conclusions

In its core commitments, CRT is incompatible with Christianity

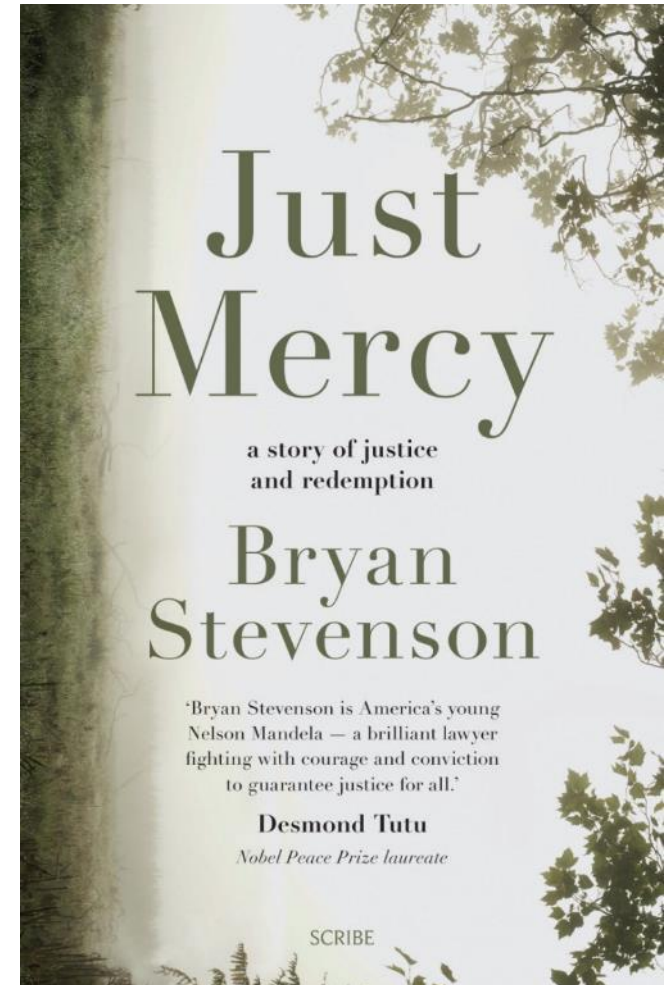
“in its mainstream expression — **[critical race theory]** is another manifestation of the age-old enslavement of the fallen human heart to self-deification (“I will be my own god”), and **self-definition** (“I will define my own essential identity”), and **self-determination** (“I will decide my own truth and my own morality, without deference to any authority outside myself”)...these are the **root problems of the mainstream, scholarly, decades-long development of critical race theory**, which is why it is being so hotly contested. And in that sense, **rightly contested.**” – **Pastor John Piper**



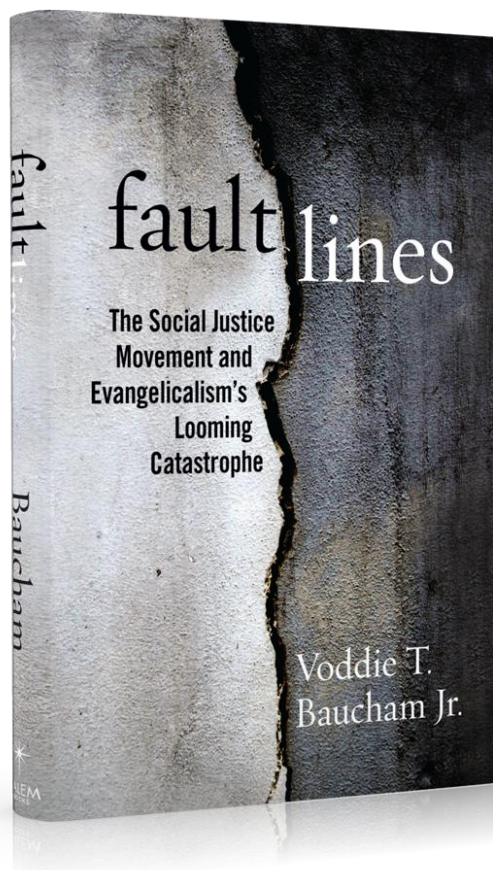
Beyond Racial Gridlock, by Dr. George Yancey



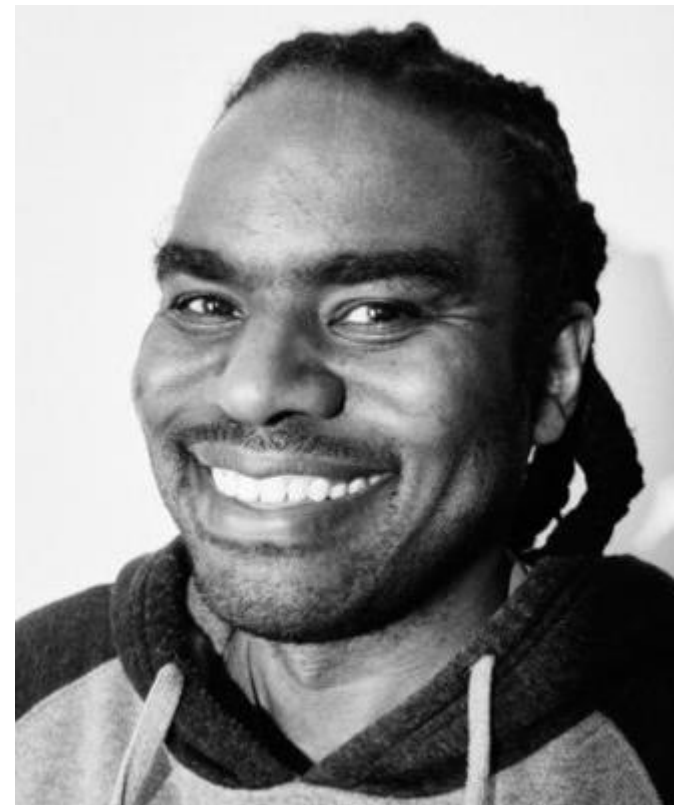
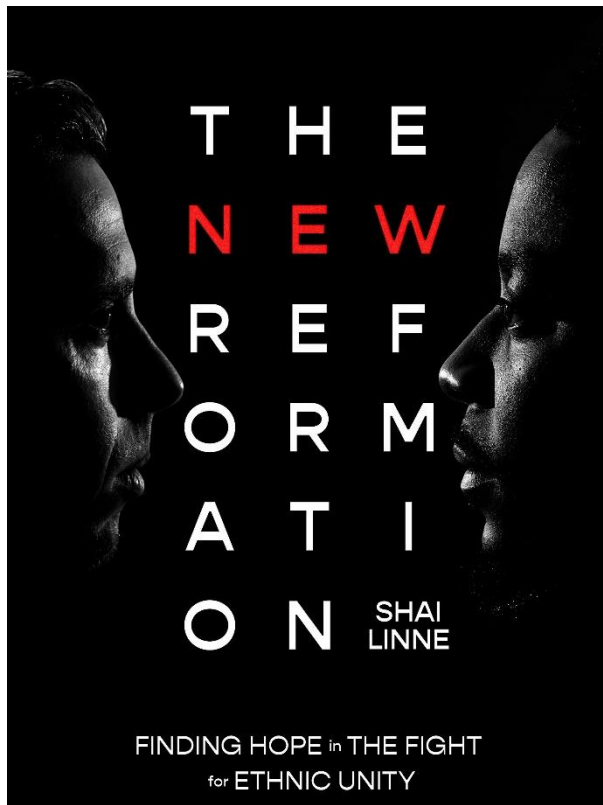
Just Mercy, Bryan Stevenson



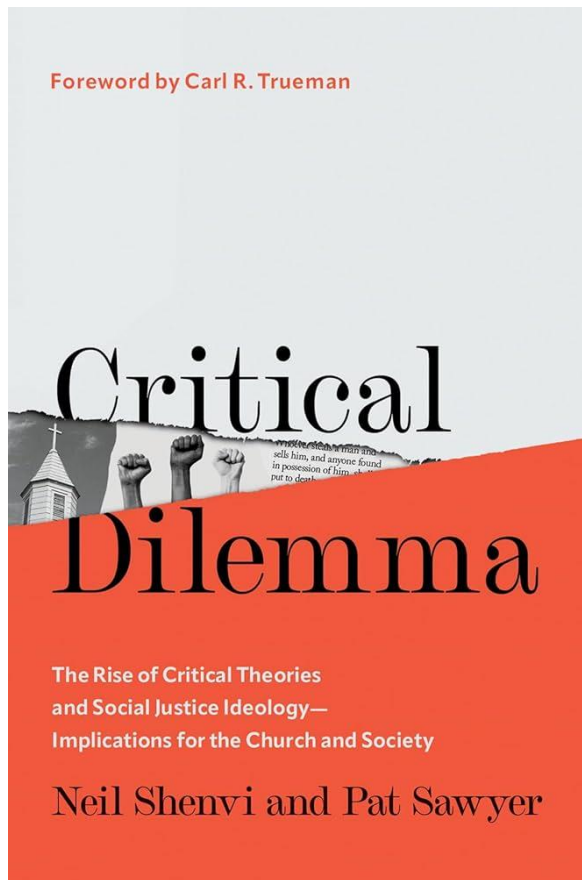
Fault Lines, by Voddie Baucham



The New Reformation, by Shai Linne



Critical Dilemma



5. Critical Race Theory . . . . .	.141
Origins and Development . . . . .	.143
Primary Tenets of Critical Race Theory Scholarship. . . . .	.152
Four Central Ideas in Critical Race Theory Scholarship. . . . .	.154
“Racism is endemic, normal, permanent, and pervasive.”. . .	.154
“Racism is concealed beneath ideas like colorblindness, meritocracy, individualism, neutrality, and objectivity.”. . .	.156
“Lived experience is critical to understanding racism.”. . .	.162
“Racism is one of many ‘interlocking systems of oppression.’”.	.164
Do Critics of CRT Misidentify It? . . . . .	.169
Summary . . . . .	.172
 10. Problems with Critical Race Theory. . . . .	.317
Who Counts? . . . . .	.318
Intersectional Oppression . . . . .	.320
Law as Whiteness . . . . .	.323
Norms as Whiteness . . . . .	.327
Disparities as Racism . . . . .	.331
Racism as Ubiquitous. . . . .	.344
Inordinate Suspicion . . . . .	.346
Race and Identity . . . . .	.346
Temporal Liberation over Spiritual Liberation . . . . .	.349
Additional Concerns . . . . .	.350
Summary . . . . .	.351
 11. Collective, Ancestral Guilt: An Excursus. . . . .	.355

Acknowledgements and additional resources

Dr. Christina Shenvi



Dr. Pat Sawyer



- “Is Critical Race Theory Biblical? No.” Interview with Pastor Mike Winger
- “Is Critical Race Theory compatible with Christianity?” Debate with Pastor Rasool Berry on *Unbelievable? With Justin Brierley*
- Cline and Shenvi, “What if CRT Were Just a Legal Theory? A Christian Critique,” *Liberty University Law Review*, 2023.
- Twitter @NeilShenvi, @RealPatSawyer