

EXCERPT



Untangling Critical Race Theory
What Christians Need to Know and Why It Matters

June 25, 2024 | \$22, 272 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0481-4

Why We Need Another Book on Race

CRT originated in the 1980s with a group of activist-minded law scholars who'd grown discouraged at the ongoing presence of disparities between white and black folks across society, even a decade after civil rights legislation made overt discrimination illegal. Their work defied the prevailing narrative at the time, that post-civil-rights America was now an equitable democracy whose treasures were always equally available to anyone who lived responsibly enough to receive them. Instead, they exposed how the legal system had embedded enough racially significant policies and patterns that disproportionate outcomes were almost guaranteed without ever appearing racist on the surface. Their work showed how racism could be present without racists, and it shook legal scholarship at its core.

But today CRT gets credited or condemned for conflicts happening all over the place. You hear about school curriculums teaching white kids to hate themselves: CRT. One-sided diversity seminars in the workplace: CRT. People being "canceled" on campuses and online: CRT. Athletes wearing justice slogans on their jerseys: CRT. It's not always clear what the three letters mean, but they seem to create problems between people wherever they show up.

In every lane of social life, a provocative lexicon confronts us with troubling ideas like "social justice," "white privilege," "white supremacy," and "intersectionality," disrupting concepts that sound vaguely familiar in some ways and radically new in others. We're being thrown into academic currents whose streams most of us rarely wade in, talking about subjects most of us intentionally avoid, with words and phrases whose meaning seems to change depending on who uses them. It feels like you've entered an ongoing conversation and you're not sure how to catch up.

Many in the evangelical Christian world have risen up to condemn CRT language and the ideas behind it, or at least what they perceive CRT to be based on social posts and media coverage. They warn that all of these concepts have roots in Marxism and Critical Theory—two other hastily condemned but little understood worlds—and are destructive to Christian faith. Disagreement about the relative danger of CRT has split churches, terminated pastors, and cost parachurch organizations staff and donors.

You hear the president of the United States condemn the use of Critical Race Theory in all government institutions, followed soon after by the presidents of major Southern Baptist universities doing the same on behalf of their own. Christians aligned with these decisions affirm rejecting CRT wholeheartedly, but if you ask them what they mean by the phrase, you'll almost never hear the same definition twice.

But then you spend time with a Bible-believing, theologically robust, and culturally shrewd person who barely bats an eye at the language of CRT, who suggests that there's greater evil in ignoring the conditions prompting the language in the first place. They see CRT concepts as pointing out evils that have been ignored for generations, particularly in the church. They believe conversations stemming from CRT ideas can unite the church and help lead people to Jesus, but when you ask them, they rarely know the origins of many of the concepts.

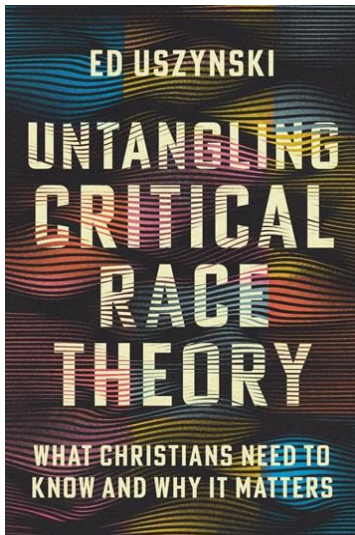


Tara Burns, print and online publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or tburns@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, author interviews
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



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One friend says CRT is of the devil, while another suggests not paying attention to the social realities behind CRT is the true demon. The red-meat commentary on either side produces a hysteria like medieval churches accusing heretics. The ugliness is real.

As Christians, how do we sort through all the rhetoric?

If you're holding this book, I'm assuming you want a deeper grasp of CRT. Critical Race Theory depends on Critical Theory, and Critical Theory grew out of Marxism—none of which are light reading. But it's also a mistake using those words interchangeably as though they're all the same thing. They're interrelated, share certain "familial" characteristics, and build on one another, but they're three separate bodies of thought arising in different contexts to serve different purposes. This book will help readers understand the distinction and show that while all three have problems, they can all be far more instructive for Christians than people realize.

If you're considering the racial tension of our current moment and have to choose between a book on radical strategies and your Bible, study your Bible. But if you've got room for both, anyone seeking to live faithfully and missionally needs a generous understanding of all that gets called "radical" in this broken world. This book will take you in that direction.

I know it's easier to wade in superficial and politically charged soundbites and call it a day. But if we want to untangle the racial web in our cultural moment, we need to recognize not only what these academic disciplines sought to correct, but also why people are attracted to their ideas today.

—Adapted from the introduction, "Why We Need Another Book on Race"

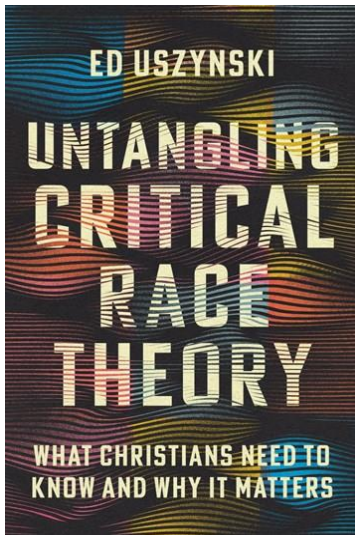


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Q & A



Untangling Critical Race Theory *What Christians Need to Know and Why It Matters*

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"If you want an intellectually lazy approach to CRT that takes a binary—'CRT is evil!' or 'CRT is 100 percent true!'—then stick to your favorite partisan pundit to spoon-feed you the 'truth.' But if you want an honest and responsible guide to help you think through the complexities of CRT and how it contributes to our understanding of race relations, then I cannot more highly recommend this book."

Preston Sprinkle, author and host of *Theology in the Raw* podcast, from the foreword

A Guide to the History, Truths, Myths, and Present Controversies of Critical Race Theory

Put simply, what exactly is Critical Race Theory (CRT)?

Ed Uszynski: CRT is an approach to thinking about the consequences of living in a racialized culture that counters commonly held assumptions about the way race works in America. CRT is a discipline whose roots grew in the soil of 1980s law and public policy making but whose quest for application has been venturing across disciplines for decades. Its proposals challenge the "we're all good now" attitude regarding consequences of our racial formation circulating since the passing of civil rights laws in the 1960s.

Critical Race Theory tends to get an array of responses. Why did you decide to tackle a book on such a complicated and often controversial topic?

Ed: The outrage toward Critical Race Theory coming from a particular branch of White evangelicalism became the latest distraction keeping us from understanding and addressing more long-standing racial problems. As someone from a racially diverse upbringing, from a White conservative Evangelical heritage, and with a PhD from a secular institution grounded in Critical Theory, I wanted to serve people trying to make sense of what's going on but aren't sure where to start.

Who did you have in mind as you wrote *Untangling Critical Race Theory*?

Ed: I wrote the book for white folks who want to grow in their understanding of the real issues behind the CRT debate currently in the church and society. I wrote it for people who want to grow in their crosscultural competency but find themselves only hearing from sources concerned with destroying political progressivism.

How has Critical Race Theory been distorted?

Ed: Conservatives distort it by using it as a catchall term for any racial topic being raised, any radical Progressive initiative, or anything whatsoever that produces discomfort in racial conversations. Progressives distort it by radicalizing it in ways that replace one form of injustice for another, using it as a weapon to attack Western liberalism.



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Ed Uszynski is a content specialist for Cru, Athletes in Action, and FamilyLife. He also serves as a oneness and diversity consultant for church and parachurch organizations. He is uniquely positioned to address the dynamics of Critical Race Theory. He earned his PhD in American culture studies in the university world and navigated the realities of Marxist Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory—while still a white male conservative Christian ministering in traditional contexts.

What are some of the common criticisms of Critical Race Theory?

Ed: At its worst, CRT can be reductionistic, heavy-handed, and ungenerous in the way it manifests in people leveraging it. It encourages people to foreground race as the source of every social problem when in a specific situation race may have been a present but negligible factor. It also lends itself to radical Progressivism in ways not all theorists would affirm. In these cases, criticism may be just.

Why should Christians NOT be afraid of Critical Race Theory?

Ed: The main tenets of CRT don't conflict with the Bible. They probably challenge our politics, but more importantly, they always challenge how we think about race, how we process the consequences of racism, and how we audit the formation of our racial imaginations—especially as white folks. Hasty reactions to racial protest within the church aren't helpful. Slowing down to really understand what's going on from multiple sides might be.

Why should Christians continue to talk about Critical Race Theory?

Ed: The current CRT dustup offers another opportunity to expand our crosscultural concern and education. Real CRT, which I set out to describe, draws our attention to problems we not only should not be threatened by as Christians but also should actually be working to resolve in our communities.

Why will *Untangling Critical Race Theory* be a welcome perspective to most readers?

Ed: I can't promise that it will be, but I'm trying to write from the position of "cultural translator" for those trying to understand what real CRT is seeking, how it gets distorted and misused, and why our current political climate makes the conversation far more toxic than it should be within the church. I hope *Untangling Critical Race Theory* offers a level-headed journey through the issues in an effort to account for multiple sides of the controversy, especially shedding light in the direction that seems to be most often ignored or flippantly dismissed. We need to stop overlooking the problems and assumptions producing CRT in the first place.

What do you hope readers take away about Critical Race Theory?

Ed: I hope we'll spend less energy fretting over Marxist-inspired ideologies and put more effort toward genuinely understanding what makes them attractive to people in the first place. I hope we'll move beyond settling for racial sensitivity, and instead commit ourselves to pursuing racial sensibility, which is far more important and requires a deeper understanding of the issues and history behind them. I hope more Christians will invest more time investigating patterns, procedures, and policies that hinder crosscultural integration, and less time trying to justify or prove their lack of racism. I hope we'll start to feel more deeply how poorly lived Christianity—in this case having an "uncritical race theory"—makes radical Progressivism attractive to people who really just need to experience Christians living their Bibles.



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