AN ANARCHIST INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL RACE THEORY
BY RACE (REVOLUTIONARY ANTI-AUTHORITARIANS OF COLOR)

Louisville Anarchist Federation
http://LAFF-experiment.org

No Borders
Louisville’s Radical Lending Library
http://ImagineNoBorders.org
Nuance theory: View that one may determine the essential qualities of a group such as women, and that difference from that essential core may be treated as slight variations or shades of difference.

Paradigm: Reigning system of belief in a discipline that controls what is seen as possible, relevant, and valid.

Perspectivism: Belief that a person’s or group’s position or standpoint greatly influences how they see truth and reality.

Principle of involuntary sacrifice: The notion that costs of civil rights advances are always placed on blacks or low-income whites.

Property interest in whiteness: Idea that white skin and identity are economically valuable.

Racial fraud & box checking: Action on the part of a non-minority person, or one with a very slight connection with a minority group, to gain the benefit of minority status, as with affirmative action.

Racial realism: View that racial progress is sporadic and that people of color are doomed to experience only infrequent peaks followed by regression.

Reconstruction: Period when society is attempting to redress racial wrongs consistently and in thoroughgoing fashion.

Restrictive covenant: Legally enforceable limitation on land use or occupancy, often created by the original owner or developer of neighborhoods.
**False consciousness:**
Phenomenon in which oppressed people internalize and identify with attitudes and ideology of the controlling class

**Legal realism:**
Scholarship that focuses on the theory or practice of unearthing and replacing underlying rhetorical structures of the current social order, insofar as these are unfair to disenfranchised groups

**Hegemony:**
Domination by the ruling class, and unconscious acceptance of that state of affairs

**Legal storytelling:**
Quality of an instruction, such as law, which is viewed as justified and worthy of respect

**Hypodescent:**
“One-drop rule” that holds that anyone with any degree of discernible African ancestry is black

**Immigrant analogy:**
Belief that racialized minority groups, especially Latinos/as and Asians, will follow the same path of assimilation as white European ethnics

**Legitimacy:**
Belief that individuals and classes often have shared or overlapping interests or traits

**Indeterminacy:**
Idea that legal reasoning rarely, if ever, has one right answer and that politics and social pressures on judged influence outcomes

**Interest convergence:**
Theorized on by Derrick Bell that the majority group tolerates advances for racial justice only when it suits its interest to do so

**Liberalism:**
Political philosophy that holds that the purpose of government is to maximize liberty; in civil rights, the view that law should enforce formal equality in treatment

**Intersectionality:**
Belief that individuals and classes often have shared or overlapping interests or traits

**Merit:**
Individual worthiness; critical race scholars question the view that people may be ranked by merit and that distribution of benefits is rational and just

**Model minority myth:**
Idea that Asian Americans are hard-working, intelligent, and successful and that other groups should emulate them

**Microaggression:**
Stunning small encounter with racism, usually unnoticed by members of the majority race

**Multiple consciousness:**
Ability of people of color to perceive something in two or more ways, for example as a way a member of his or her group would see it and as a white would

**Normative:**
Of, pertaining to, or based on a norm, especially one regarded as broad or universal

**Ostrom:**
Another concern of the Crits—appropriate for an understanding of the composition of social change—is the concept of interest convergence. This is the thesis that judicial progress only occurs when it suits the interest of dominant forces in society. Racial justice in the United States can be seen then as contingent on the generosity and magnanimity of white (or majoritarian) society. Derrick Bell makes this argument most pointedly in his review of Brown vs. Board of Education, making the claim that segregated schools served a malignant purpose for American foreign policy during the Cold War so that changing segregation was therefore an acceptable reform for dominant society.

Finally, CRT has had a running commentary on the phenomena of rights within jurisprudence that is worth examining. “Rights are almost always procedural (for example, to fair process) rather than substantive (for example, to food, housing, or education)... (R)ights are almost always cut back when they conflict with the interests of the powerful... (R)ights are said to be alienating. They separate people from each other... rather than encouraging them to form close, respectful communities... The group whom they supposedly benefit always greets cases like Brown with great celebration. But after the celebration dies down the great victory is quietly cut back by narrow interpretation, administrative obstruction, or delay.”

This leads to an analysis of the victories of the Civil Rights Movement being, not a righting of wrongs, but a political convenience that very well may have served white society (being a possible description of dominant society) more than those who claimed victory. This is an entirely separate, but parallel, understanding to the perspective that says that the ‘victory’ was only possible in the context of the more radical aspirations of some being crushed by assassination, prison, and the process of assimilation. If the successes of the Civil Rights Movement have been primarily felt by
those who had political power prior to
the movement, it has not prevented new
politicians from arising as a consequence.
The result is that these politicians use the
compromised arguments that resulted in
the CRM to work for social change today.
The bar has been lowered.

The aspect of Critical Race Theory that
sets it apart from a merely academic
pursuit of an idealized justice (as difficult
to actually find as to catch a fox by its tail)
is its practical implications within legal
scholarship. While that practice does
not particularly inspire us as anarchists,
the application of these critiques in the
real world does. As a project we
would set ourselves to articulate a
necessarily anarchist theory of race with
the motivation that such a clarity would
encourage our actions along lines we
actually found inspiring and not just
due to the tradition of the Civil Rights
Movement or the Black Panther Party.
Which brings us to another concept of
CRT, intersectionality, the examination of
race, sex, class, national origin, and
sexual orientation and the elevation
of their interplay as separate and
connecting disadvantage factors. We
(as in the contributors to this pamphlet)
do not experience reality as one type of
oppression, as one type of dominance. It
is the intersection of our multiple
oppressions and our process of figuring
out how to survive in the face of those
who would simplify our experience in the
name of a false unity, which serves them,
that drives the narrative of our lives.

FAQ

What is the relevance of theory when we
are trying to build a movement?

This is a false dichotomy and serves
to validate one form of transformative
action while invalidating others. We have
fundamental concerns with ‘movement-
building politics because our experience
is that they are mired in a partisan,
reformist, and political-in-a-bad-way
tradition. However we also recognize the
passion of many movement builders and
the strategic possibilities in their efforts
towards social change. If our goal is the
transformation of society then we must
work with people that have different
views. What that looks like is far more
complicated than trite calls to unity or for
respecting differences, especially if it is in
the name of ‘the movement’.

*How can we take Critical Race Theory and
get something tangible and concrete out
of it?*

That is the project that we are interested
in. The cooption of Civil Rights rhetoric by
mainstream politicians and by the left has
denatured it of its socially transformative
powers. We have respect for that history,
but recognize that in this time the political
and cultural conditions have changed.
We have to be challenging old ideas and
moving on. CRT does both and informs
our anarchist politics with a racial analysis
that it has, to date, sorely lacked.

*What’s wrong with essentialism? If not
essentialism then what?*

Essentialism requires a search for the
right unit for social analysis and change.
Oppressed people have the fact that
they are oppressed in common but
the forms of that oppression vary from
group to group. Thus, the political
needs and strategies of social groups
will differ. Liberals ignore problems
of intersectionality and search for
universals. An alternative to essentialism
is that there is no such thing as inherent
characteristics. No person has an easily
stated identity; everyone has conflicting,
overlapping identities and allegiances. We
do not believe that all non-white people
should compromise their differences and
form a united front.

Critical Race Theory Glossary

Both this glossary and article would not
have been possible without the book
*Critical Race Theory—an introduction* by
Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic.

**Bicultural education:**
Pedagogical approach that encourages
retention of a child’s original or family
culture

**Binary paradigm of race:**
Pattern of framing race issues in terms
of two categories, such as black and
white

**Biological view of race:**
Once popular view that humanity is
divided into four or five major groups,
corresponding to objective and real
physical differences

**Call to context:**
Belief that social relations and truth
require close attention to history,
pArticularity, and experience

**Color imagery:**
Words, texts, and television images
that associate skin color with traits
such as innocence, criminality, or
physical beauty

**Countermajoritarianism:**
View that the court system is free
to strike down laws enacted by the
majority that are unfair to minority
groups

**Counter-storytelling:**
Writing that aims to cast doubt on the
validity of accepted premises or myths,
especially ones held by the majority

**Critical legal studies:**
Legal movement that challenged
liberalism from the Left, denying that
law was neutral, that every case had a
single correct answer, and that rights
were of vital importance

**Critique of rights:**
Critical legal studies position that rights
are alienating, ephemeral, and much
less useful than most people think

**Deconstruction:**
Intellectual approach that targets
traditional interpretations of terms,
concepts, and practices, showing that
they contain unsuspected meanings or
internal contradictions

**Determinism:**
View that individuals and culture are
products of particular forces, such as
economics, biology, or the search for
high status

**Differential racialization:**
Process by which racial and ethnic
groups are viewed and treated
differently by, mainstream society

**Discourse:**
Formal, extensive, oral or written
treatment of a subject; the way we
speak about something

**Empathic fallacy:**
Mistaken belief that sweeping social
reform can be accomplished through
speech and protest alone

**Essentialism:**
Search for the unique essence of a
group

**Eurocentricism:**
Tendency to interpret the world
in terms of European values and
perspectives and the belief that they
are superior

**Exceptionalism:**
Belief that a particular group’s history
justifies treating it as unique